

1. Back to Grimmauld Place

Summers for Harry Potter were never enjoyable experiences, and this summer, the summer after his fifth year, was no exception. Harry went about his days mechanically, awakening each morning to prepare breakfast and perform his other chores. Once his morning chores were completed, Harry would spend the rest of the day in his bedroom, poring over homework assignments. The Dursleys, for the most part, left Harry alone. The Order members had given Uncle Vernon such a scare that they barely spoke to Harry.

For Harry, that same feeling of being separate from everyone else continued. He had always felt apart from everyone. Growing up, the other children ostracized him out of fear of incurring Dudley's wrath. When Harry found out he was a wizard, he felt different again, though in a good way, from the Muggles. When he got to school, he found that he was different even in the wizarding world, for he was the Boy-Who-Lived. But now, after the revelations of last spring, Harry was different once again. Knowing his destiny, to kill or be killed, separated himself from everyone else and gave him the burden of responsibility that no fifteen-year old should bear.

As Harry bent over his Potions homework, a soft, hesitant knock sounded on his door. "H-Harry? That man is here for you again," he heard his cousin stutter, then run away. Under any other circumstance, Harry would have found his cousin's fear amusing; now, it barely registered. Harry closed his book, marking his spot with a bit of parchment, and went downstairs. Professor Snape waited for him in the entranceway and acknowledged Harry as he approached.

"Potter. Ready?" he asked simply. Harry nodded and led Snape to his bedroom. As soon as Snape closed the door behind him, he pointed his wand at Harry. "Legilimens!" he said. But unlike the lessons in Snape's classroom, Harry did not relive a rush of painful and humiliating memories. Rather, only a few, innocuous memories flashed past his mind even as Snape strengthened his spell. After a few moments, Harry was able to push Snape away. "Very good, Potter," Snape said, almost begrudgingly as their lessons drew to a close. Harry smirked oddly at Snape, which produced a look of

curiosity on the Potion Master's face. "We shall continue our lessons next week at Grimmauld Place."

"Grimmauld Place?" Harry asked, the barest hint of emotion in his voice.

"That's correct. Professor Dumbledore feels you have spent enough time here with the Muggles," Snape replied, practically spitting out the word Muggle. "This Saturday at noon you will be escorted to Grimmauld Place. Be sure to pack and be prepared; we have little time to waste on your dawdling." Harry nodded, not responding to the relatively light insults of his professor. Once Snape left the house, Harry allowed himself a small smile, the first in months. Not caused by the idea of returning to Grimmauld Place, but rather at what he was able to accomplish during the lesson without Snape's knowledge.

Resisting Snape's Legilimency attacks were much easier over the summer. Harry attributed it to the fact that he had much better control over his emotions; in fact, Harry doubted he had any emotions left. He supposed he should feel overwhelming grief and guilt over Sirius and almost getting his friends killed. Instead, he felt detached from the whole situation. Harry wondered if that was some sort of defense mechanism, or whether it was an effect of knowing the prophecy. He didn't really care though, because either way, it was much better than living through days and nights of guilt.

Neither was Harry's glimmer of happiness caused by his ability to resist Snape's attack. While Harry was practicing his skills of Occlumency, the flipside of that ability was Legilimency. Harry had performed Legilimency once before by accident at Hogwarts, somehow able to see Snape's memories during an Occlumency lesson. He had been quietly practicing Legilimency on his witless relatives, though he had been thoroughly bored by the ordinary memories that he saw in the feeble minds. Today, though, Harry had been able to view Snape's memories without his knowledge, while at the same time countering Snape's own attack. Harry figured his innate ability of Legilimency could be traced back to Voldemort, just as his "gift" of Parseltongue was unwittingly passed along.

Harry thought about his reaction to the idea of returning to Grimmauld Place. On one hand, it would be nice to see people he liked again. On the other hand, he would probably be reminded daily of Sirius in his ancestral home. And finally, Harry knew he would be bombarded with questions about how he was feeling; as well as looks of concern and pity. It was a bit too much to think about, all these conflicting emotions, so Harry simply returned to his room and began packing, having nothing else to do.

Harry patiently waited in his living room at noon on Saturday. His relatives had scampered off for lunch, not willing to be home when *those* people arrived. Harry idly wondered how his guards would arrive, and how many of them. A little after noon, there was a knock at the door. Harry looked at the door in bemusement before opening it. In previous years, Harry had been picked up via flying car, floo network, and a break-in. Knocking on a door seemed so...mundane for a bunch of wizards.

"Wotcher Harry!" Nymphadora Tonks greeted him cheerfully after Harry opened the door. Harry stood aside and gestured for them to enter. Tonks, Remus Lupin, and "Mad-Eye" Moody entered the house. Harry looked outside for a moment, surprised that additional guards hadn't been sent.

"That's it? No more?" he asked.

"That's it Potter," Moody replied. "At least, that's all you can see."

Harry nodded as Lupin walked over to him. He placed his hands on Harry's shoulders and looked at him in the eye. "How are you, Harry?"

Harry knew he would be hearing a lot of that over the next couple of days. Harry shrugged and replied, "OK." It was, after all, the truth. He knew they were probably expecting him to be either inconsolable from grief or extremely angry. Harry was neither of these things.

Remus didn't look convinced by his answer, but accepted it nonetheless. "Well, Ok Harry. Let's get your things and get a move on." Moody cast a spell on Harry's trunk, shrinking it. With Moody leading the way and Lupin and Tonks on either side, Harry left 4 Privet Drive. To Harry's surprise, they headed towards an unremarkable car parked in the driveway. "A car?" he asked.

Tonks nodded. "The Ministry graciously offered the use of a car after the events last spring. It's more secure and faster, plus a lot more comfortable then riding a broom," she said with a smile.

Harry only nodded in acknowledgement and climbed in, ignoring the concerned looks of that followed his every move. The ride was spent in silence.

2. Emotions Unleashed

Harry emerged from the Ministry car as it parked in-between Numbers 11 and 13 Grimmauld Place. Harry looked around briefly for signs of Muggles, then thought of the words on parchment he saw almost a year ago to the date. Soon, Number 12 Grimmauld Place shimmered into view. Harry followed the others as they walked in, dragging his trunk behind him. Harry stood in the entranceway, preparing himself for the onslaught of emotions that would hit him from seeing Sirius' home. To his relief, nothing came. The foyer looked the same as when he last left with Sirius' mother's portrait hidden behind a curtain and a sense of gloom permeating throughout.

"Who else is here?" he asked idly.

"No one right now," Moody replied. "We don't have a meeting tonight."

"The Weasleys are staying at the Burrow. The Ministry erected a number of protective wards around their home; they were very obliging once they finally fessed up that You-Know-Who is back," Lupin added.

Harry felt a little sad at the news; while he was happy that the Weasleys would be safe, it seemed to make for a boring and lonely stay. "Is anyone staying here besides me?"

"Well, I'm staying here, and people drop by all the time," said Lupin. "Hermione should be arriving soon."

"Hermione?" Harry asked.

Lupin nodded. "Normally she would be at the Burrow, but it's become rather crowded there lately with all the Weasley children home. She'll spend the rest of the summer here."

Harry nodded, unsure how to take the news. Normally, he would be happy that one of his best friends would be staying at Grimmauld Place, but part of him wished that it would be the redheaded one. Hermione was wonderful, to be sure, but she would almost certainly ask him about Sirius and how he was feeling; Ron would

simply talk about Quidditch and other “safer” things. Something else Lupin said registered. “All the Weasley children? Including Percy?”

Tonks nodded. “He finally clued-in into what we’ve been saying all along. It’s hard to deny You-Know-Who’s back when his own boss finally admits the truth. Some of the boys are giving him a hard time, but Molly and Arthur are happy.”

Harry nodded, happy for the Weasleys. “Well, I think I’ll go unpack now,” he said, trudging up the stairs to the room he shared with Ron last year. He tried to ignore the worried eyes that followed him up the stairs.

Harry sat at his desk, reading his Charms textbook. He hadn’t come out of his room since he unpacked, unwilling to face the pitying looks of the others. A knock on the door interrupted his reading.

“Harry? Are you in there?” Hermione’s voice called out.

Harry looked up, torn between happiness at the sound of her voice and reluctance to endure her well-intentioned questions. But Harry knew he couldn’t keep her waiting outside his door, so he got up and opened the door. Hermione stood in the hallway, her face displaying her own mixture of emotions – the happiness and concern for him. They looked at each other for a moment, before Harry broke the silence. “Hi Hermione.”

“Oh Harry!” Hermione cried out, then enveloped him in a hug. Harry had expected this (after all, she was the hugging-type) and hugged his friend back, though with less enthusiasm. “Have you been inside your room since you got here? C’mon, let’s get something to eat,” she said, grabbing hold of his hand and leading him downstairs. There, Tonks and Lupin were preparing a lunch of sandwiches as they entered.

Conversation was stilted throughout lunch, as no one quite knew how to talk to Harry. He wasn’t sure what they were expecting, but it was clear that no one had expected to see a Harry that *wasn’t* overly emotional. Harry looked up as Hermione coughed, her hand held

against her chest. In a sudden rush, Harry felt an emotion he hadn't felt in a long while, or at least an emotion he had been suppressing: guilt. With a startling clarity, Harry remembered that moment in the Department of Mysteries when Dolohev's curse struck Hermione down, when Harry thought she had been killed because of his foolishness. Harry felt the sting of tears forming in his eyes, and he quickly quelled his rise of emotions as he surreptitiously wiped at his eyes. From that moment on, Harry found it difficult to look Hermione in the eyes.

Two nights later, Lupin asked Harry to meet him in the library after dinner. Hermione was there when he walked in, the two of them looking at him intently.

"What's going on?" Harry asked, his suspicion growing.

Lupin glanced at Hermione before speaking. "We need to talk, Harry. *You* need to talk. It's not healthy keeping everything bottled up inside."

"Talk? What do I need to talk about?"

"About Sirius," Lupin replied. "About Sirius, about your dreams, about everything that happened at the Department of Mysteries."

"And why do I *need* to talk about that?" Harry asked calmly. "I think I'm dealing with everything that's happened just fine."

"Fine?" Hermione spoke for the first time. "Do you honestly think that you're acting *fine*? You're acting nothing like the Harry I know."

"And how would you want me to act?" Harry said, his anger rising. "What do you want from me? Do you want me to sit here and cry my eyes out, or scream and yell out about the unfairness of it all?" he demanded.

"Yes!" Hermione cried. "We just want you to show some emotion, any emotion. Not be this emotionless robot you've become." Harry just snorted and looked away. They were silent for a long moment

before Hermione spoke again. "What did I do, Harry? Why won't you talk to me?"

Harry turned to face her, still not able to meet her eyes. "You didn't do anything, Hermione."

"Then why won't you look at me anymore?"

Harry forced himself to look at her in the eyes, where he saw her confusion and hurt. Despite everything, Harry knew he would do anything to take away her pain. "It's not you, Hermione. It's...it's me," he said haltingly.

"What do you mean? What is it, Harry?" she asked softly.

Harry fought to find the words. "Every time I see you, I remember. I remember what happened...at the Department of Mysteries..." Harry's words faltered.

"Oh Harry," Hermione sighed, crossing the room and enveloping Harry in another hug, less fierce than the first but more tender.

"It's just that...you almost died Hermione," Harry continued, as a tear escaped his eye. "And it would be all my fault. It *is* all my fault that you were hurt, that everyone was hurt and that Sirius died."

"No!" Lupin said as Hermione hugged Harry tighter. "It's not your fault, Harry. Don't ever think that. It's You-Know-Who's fault. He's the cause of all of this."

"And it was our choice, Harry," Hermione said into his ear. "We knew the risks, we chose to follow you."

Harry shook his head angrily, tears falling freely now. "It's not enough! People keep getting hurt or dying because of me! You don't know what that feels like!"

"Please, Harry," Hermione pleaded. "Please believe us when we tell you that no one blames you. No one thinks that this is your fault. We love you, and we'd follow you no matter where you go. Sirius wouldn't regret his decision to follow after you, and I know I

don't." Harry held Hermione tightly as his body was wracked with sobs. All the emotion he had buried over the summer seemed to pour forth at once, taking away his ability to talk. Hermione just held him, whispering soothing words in his ear. Eventually, Harry broke free of her embrace and wiped at his eyes.

"I'm sorry," he said, embarrassed over his tears. "I-"

"There's nothing to be sorry, or ashamed, about Harry," Lupin said. "Here," he said, offering Harry a bottle. Harry took the bottle and looked at the label.

"Fire whiskey?" he asked, surprised.

Lupin smiled. "I know your underage, but I think the situation calls for it," he said, taking the bottle back and taking a long pull. To Harry's astonishment, Hermione took the bottle from Lupin and took a long drink herself, coughing afterwards.

"Your turn," she said, once she was able to recover her voice, handing the bottle to Harry.

Harry awoke the next morning with a pounding headache. Harry and Hermione had stayed up until late into the night, finishing off the bottle of fire whiskey and listening to Lupin tell tales of Sirius and the Marauders. Harry was surprised that Hermione, by-the-books Hermione, would drink fire whiskey, until he realized that she was doing so for him. It made him appreciate just how much she meant to him. After Tonks let them suffer for a minute, in retaliation for excluding her, she cast a quick charm on Harry and Hermione to take away the headache. The rest of their stay at 12 Grimmauld Place went more smoothly. Although they never spoke again about Sirius or the Department of Mysteries, Harry had somewhat returned to his normal self, and that was good enough for everyone.

3. A New Year and A New View

Harry's stay at 12 Grimmauld Place quickly came to an end. His lessons with Snape continued, and Ron and Ginny had come to spend the last few days with them. To Harry's relief, Ron kept conversation to topics like Quidditch and lunch, carefully skirting around any mention of Sirius.

"C'mon, let's go let's go!" Lupin's voice echoed throughout the house. Harry quickly shoved the last of his books into his trunk and dragged it downstairs.

"It's about time!" Tonks said. "My goodness Harry, even Ginny and Hermione beat you."

Harry shrugged and smiled. "At least I beat Ron," he said, as the person in question came running down the stairs, chasing his trunk.

"Ok, let's get a move on. We don't want to be late," Moody said gruffly. The four students and their escorts piled into a Ministry car and set off for King's Cross Station.

"Excited?" Hermione asked as they rode.

"Definitely!" Ron said. "No more OWLs!"

"Speak for yourself," Ginny said glumly.

"Aw, don't worry Gin. You've got big brother watching out for you."

"*That's* what I'm afraid of," she said teasingly.

"What about you, Harry? Excited to go back to school?"

Harry nodded and made a noncommittal noise. While he was indeed happy to return to the only real home he'd ever known, part of him dread the return as well, wondering what new peril or danger he would inevitably encounter this year, and wondering if he would live to see the end of it. But thoughts like that were best kept to oneself.

Harry settled into his compartment as Ron, Hermione, and Ginny left to attend the prefect meeting. To Mrs. Weasley's delight, Ginny was the 5th year girl prefect for Gryffindor. Harry thought that perhaps he should feel some sort of resentment about not being a prefect, especially given Dumbledore's reason for not making him one. But frankly, Harry couldn't bring himself to care. After all, how important was being a prefect when compared with being the only one able to defeat Voldemort? Harry sat alone in his compartment, watching the countryside pass by. Although he loved being with his friends, he missed the privacy that the Dursleys provided and that he hadn't had while at 12 Grimmauld Place. His solitude was broken when the sliding of the door.

"Hmm..so, all alone, are we Potter? Abandoned by your friends after almost getting them killed, I see."

Harry looked at the source of the interruption. "Malfoy," he said grimly.

Draco Malfoy only looked at Harry, clearly relishing the opportunity of getting Harry alone. As always, Crabbe and Goyle flanked their leader, looking as menacing as ever, as the three Slytherins entered the compartment. "This time you'll pay, Potter. No one to save you," he said, drawing his wand. Harry only watched, his own wand in his hand the moment he heard Malfoy's voice. Harry prepared to cast a shielding charm, but it proved unnecessary.

"You might want to think about that, Malfoy," Harry heard. Malfoy turned, and was greeted with the sight of a crowd of people standing outside the compartment, many with wands drawn. Although difficult to see past Crabbe and Goyle's immense bulk, Harry spotted Susan Bones, Terry Boot, and Dean Thomas; he assumed the rest of the DA members weren't far behind. Malfoy gave them an irritated look before pushing his way back into the hallway, Crabbe and Goyle following dutifully behind.

"You Ok, Harry?" Lavender asked him.

Harry nodded and made a show of holstering his wand. "Thanks everyone."

“Our pleasure,” piped up Justin Finch-Fletchley. “We were just waiting for Malfoy to pull something, the greasy git!”

Harry laughed, and he exchanged small talk with the DA members (those who were not prefects, at least) until Ron, Hermione, and Ginny returned. The compartment became crowded as everyone exchanged greetings and pleasantries until the four Gryffindors were left alone. Hermione and Ginny talked of mysterious girl-things while Harry and Ron played a game of Exploding Snap until they reached the castle.

Harry trudged his way to the stone gargoyle that guarded Dumbledore’s office. It was a few hours past the end of the great feast, and Hedwig visited Harry in the Gryffindor common room with a letter, requesting Harry’s presence in the Headmasters office.

The Welcoming Feast had been as sumptuous as ever. Harry watched with a sense of amusement as the tiny first years were sorted. He and Ron had traded many jokes about the little students, enduring the disapproving glare of Hermione (though, Harry did suspect a twitch in the corners of her mouth, as if she were doing her best to refrain from giggling). It was just that the newest batch of Hogwarts students is so *small*. It’s not that Harry was huge by any means; when compared to Ron, he was tiny himself, though standing next to Hermione often made him feel better. Harry had to admit to feeling a bit of uncharacteristic “coolness”; after all, he remembered how he felt as a first year when he looked down the table at all the older students. And without OWLs or NEWTs to gobble up his time, Harry was certain that this year would be the best every...aside from the annual plot to take his life. Harry looked around the Gryffindor table and realized with a start how few of his own Housemates he really knew. True, he was friendly with everyone in his year, but he hardly knew any of the seventh years, and aside from Ginny, the little Creevey boy, and the new Quidditch players, Harry didn’t know anyone in the lower years. Harry vowed that this year, he would do his best to get to know his house better, along with the other sixth years in all the houses. It’s what Sirius would have wanted.

The stone gargoyle was already revolving, revealing the staircase to Dumbledore's office, by the time Harry arrived. Harry climbed the winding stairs and knocked on the door. He heard a muffled "Come in," and Harry pushed open the door.

"Ah, welcome, welcome Mr. Potter," Dumbledore said as Harry approached his desk. Harry half-heartedly smiled in return, still somewhat wary of his headmaster. Despite the claim of revealing everything to him, Harry still felt there were things Dumbledore was keeping from him "for his own good." He was also still resentful from being kept in the dark about so much in the past.

"Headmaster," Harry said in return.

Dumbledore's smile flickered only a second at Harry's curt response. "First, let me say I've heard good things from Professor Snape about your Occlumency lessons. He has informed me that you are now capable of resisting Lord Voldemort's attempts enter your dreams." Harry only nodded, so Dumbledore continued. "I also want to reiterate my apologies from last term. I now know that I should have kept you informed of Lord Voldemort's activities, and of your role in his defeat. I promise you that this year I will be more forthcoming with information." Harry softly grunted, but if Dumbledore heard him, he chose to ignore it. "I also want to tell you that you can come to me, at anytime, if you have anything you wish to talk about, whether it is about Voldemort, Sirius, or your feelings."

At this, Harry openly snorted. "With all due respect, I have no desire to speak about my *feelings* to anyone, least of all you," he said icily. "I thank you for your time, Headmaster." Harry stood abruptly and left his office, ignoring the look of pain in the Headmaster's face. Harry returned to Gryffindor tower and went to immediately to sleep.

"C'mon Potter! Let's go, you're gonna miss breakfast!"

Harry groaned, then buried himself deeper into the warmth and comfort of his bed. "Five more minutes," he mumbled sleepily. All of a sudden, his pleasant world of soft blankets disappeared in flash as

the covers were torn from his bed, accompanied by a cackling laugh. Harry sat up, supremely irritated by the sudden change. He looked angrily over at his best friend Ron, preparing a few choice words.

But it wasn't Ron who held his blankets. Harry stared in shock at the sight of Draco Malfoy standing over him, laughing gleefully. "Malfoy!" Harry roared. "What the bloody hell do you think you're doing! Get out of here!"

The look of glee on Malfoy's face changed abruptly to one of hurt, then indignation. "Fine!" he said, throwing Harry's blankets to the floor. "Just trying to help," he said moodily as he tromped out of the dorm room. Harry could only watch him leave, clearly expecting a retort or something ominous to occur.

Harry shook his head. "What a way to start the new school year," he mumbled into his hands. Harry shook his head, trying to get rid of the last vestiges of sleep. Harry noticed it was still rather dark in the dorm room, no doubt a gloomy day for the first day of school. Grabbing for his glasses, Harry stood and made his way to the bathrooms. As Harry went about his morning bathroom ritual, he noticed things were slightly...off. It was hard to pinpoint, especially given his sleep-befuddled mind, but things were very different yet very familiar at the same time. Harry shrugged and attributed his odd feelings to the fact that this was his first time back at school since the spring. Harry hurriedly finished brushing his teeth and ran a perfunctory comb through his hair. He returned to his room, grabbed his robe and shrugged into it as he walked towards the door. Giving only a cursory glance at the mirror, Harry stepped through the door. In a sudden flash of realization, Harry stopped dead in his tracks and returned to his room, facing the mirror. In the second shock of the morning, Harry stared at his reflection. Things started to fall into place. Seeing Malfoy in the morning, the darkness of the dorm room, things slightly out of place - Harry was dressed in Slytherin robes.

4. Adjustments

Harry stood in front of the mirror, unable to form coherent thoughts, simply staring at the reflection of his Slytherin robes. A passing student finally broke him out of his stupor.

"C'mon Potter, let's get a move on. Breakfast is half over," the Slytherin said amiably as he ran by. Harry looked up and saw a student pass by, most likely a seventh year. Considering the rivalry between the Gryffindor and Slytherin Houses, Harry was not surprised that he didn't know the Slytherin's name. However, he looked old enough to be a sixth or seventh year, and Harry could rule out sixth year because he unfortunately *did* know all the sixth year Slytherins.

"I'll be right there Geoffrey," Harry called back automatically. Geoffrey?!? Since when did Harry know who Geoffrey was? The name simply came to Harry without having to think about it. Harry shook his head, frustrated at the recent turn of events. Hermione. Hermione would know what to do. He took one last look at himself, hefted his schoolbag, and took the stairs to the common room and into the dungeons beyond. Harry looked around, a bit apprehensive. He had been by the Slytherin common room once before, in second year. Now, four years later, Harry had no idea where he was in the castle, except for the fact that he was somewhere in the dungeons. Hoping to run into a familiar part of the castle, perhaps a corridor by Snape's classroom, Harry started walking. He soon found, to his immense relief and consternation, that he hadn't had to worry. His feet seemed to know the way to the Great Hall, almost as if he'd walked the same path year after year. Ignoring the looks of the students he passed in the corridors (being used to attention), Harry found himself walking into the Great Hall in no time at all.

In yet another moment of the strange and bizarre, Harry found himself conflicted as soon as he entered the Great Hall. Where to sit - Gryffindor table or Slytherin table? What was once an automatic decision became unbearably complicated. One part of him urged him to go to the Gryffindor table, find Ron and Hermione, and figure out what the heck was going on. An equally strong part told him to hurry

up and finish breakfast at the Slytherin table before classes started. For what seemed like a full minute, Harry stood rooted in place in the doorway of the Great Hall, trying to decide something as simple as which House table to sit at. Late-arriving students maneuvered around him, some throwing questioning looks at his behavior, but most simply hurried away.

“Morning Harry,” said a cheerful voice. Harry spun around and found himself in front of a dark-haired Slytherin girl he had only seen a few times. Like before, the name came to his mind effortlessly – Daphne Greengrass. A pureblood witch, Daphne had two younger sisters. Her mother and father were wealthy like the Malfoys, but Daphne was very grounded, not at all pretentious like Malfoy could be. Where this information came from, and why the first thing he thought of was that she was a pureblood witch, Harry had no ideas.

“Yoo hoo,” Daphne said in a singsong voice, waving her hand back and forth in front of Harry’s face. “Anyone there?”

Harry shook his head. “Yeah, sorry about that Daph,” he said sheepishly. “Stayed up late last night. Overslept a bit.”

Daphne smirked. “Ah,” she said. “Up late again talking with the boys about all the Slytherin girls?” she teased as they walked towards the Slytherin table.

Harry chuckled. “You wish,” he said lightly. “Though,” he added with a look of deep thought on his face. “Maybe if you were to leave a few of those buttons undone, show a bit more leg...”

Daphne laughed and slapped him lightly on the arm. “Now who’s the one doing the wishing?” she asked, and then sat down across from Pansy Parkinson. Harry stared at her a moment, shocked at his own behavior. Not only was he talking to a Slytherin as if he did so every day, but did he really say those things? Show a bit more leg? Yeesh! Harry looked at the table and saw that he was standing behind Malfoy, who was currently in a conversation with Theodore Nott. Crabbe and Goyle were nearby, shoving mountain-sized amounts of food into their mouths. Harry sat down in the empty seat between Daphne and Malfoy, feeling as if he’d been sitting at that table every day for the past five years, as opposed to where he’s

really been sitting, by Ron and Hermione. Thinking of his two friends, Harry looked over at the Gryffindor table. Malfoy, to Harry's chagrin, always sat facing the Gryffindors, and the two traded many an evil glare over the years. Now, Harry was thankful that Malfoy sat facing the other tables, as it gave Harry a good view of the Gryffindor table. Harry had to look up and down the table twice before he found his friends, for they weren't sitting in their usual spot. In fact, Harry was surprised to see Hermione sitting near Lavender and Neville, while Ron sat by Dean and Seamus - it was a bit early in the term for the two to be fighting already. Only the top of Hermione's bushy hair could be seen behind the Daily Prophet she was reading, and occasionally she would lower it to add to the conversation around her. Ron, on the other hand, was gesturing wildly, clearly describing some Quidditch move to Dean and Seamus.

"Already at work planning what to do to the Gryffindors this year?" Malfoy asked with a glint in his eye, misinterpreting the hard stares Harry was throwing at Ron and Hermione.

"Aww...be nice now, Harry," Pansy said from across the table. "Isn't it bad enough that we always beat them in everything?"

"Bah! It never hurt to remind those goody-too-shoes who's the best house here," Theodore Nott said.

"Pansy's right Harry," Daphne said next to him. "Let them recover from losing the Quidditch Cup finals from last year."

Harry chuckled. "Alright, alright," he said placating as he filled his plate with bacon and eggs. At that moment, Professor Snape walked up to them. A chorus of "Good morning, Professor Snape," broke out as Harry cringed slightly, expecting a derisive comment from the Potions Master, but he didn't even get a scornful look.

"Good morning sixth years," Snape said as he handed out the schedules. "Everyone have a good summer?"

"Yes Professor Snape," Malfoy responded for the group.

"And you, Mr. Potter? The Dursley's treat you well?"

Harry was stunned into silence. Snape was actually asking about his summer without a sneer? A nudge from Daphne brought him back to reality. "Er, yes Professor. They were fine."

Snape looked at him oddly a moment. "Very good then. I shall see you in class. Have a good morning," he said before walking down the table to the fifth years.

"Ah, great!" he heard Malfoy say happily beside him, looking at his schedule. "We have double potions first thing this morning!"

"You mean *you* have double potions," Blaise Zabini said sullenly from across the table. "I have History of Magic."

"Well, I guess we can't *all* get O's on our Potions OWLs, now can we?" Malfoy said smugly. Harry looked at his schedule and saw he too, had potions first thing. He groaned. Harry had forgotten that he would be having NEWT level Potions with Snape this year in the confusion of the events of the morning. It was definitely not something he was looking forward too, and he knew Snape would look for any excuse to kick him out of the class. Or at least, the Snape that Harry knew. This new Snape was unpredictable. A bell signifying that classes were to begin shortly sounded throughout the hall. Harry silently grabbed his bag and followed the other Slytherins into the hallway.

"Are you OK Harry," he heard Pansy ask him as they walked towards the dungeons. "You were quiet all during breakfast." Harry looked over at her, surprised. The Pansy he knew was a mean, spiteful girl, not someone who would ask about Harry Potter with genuine concern in her eyes.

"I'm fine Pansy," he replied. "Just dreading double Potions with Snape."

At that, Pansy let loose with a small chuckle and shook her head. "As if *you* have anything to worry about. If you're worried, the rest of us are doomed."

Harry forced a chuckle and a smile. "I guess you're right. Just first day nerves, I guess."

Pansy nodded. "Hey, where's your Prefect badge?" she asked, briefly running a finger over her own badge.

"My what? Ron's prefect, not me."

Pansy gave him a very odd look. "What are you talking about Harry? Who's Ron?"

"Erm," Harry stammered. He was in Slytherin, and in Slytherin, Draco was the prefect. "I-I mean, Draco, not Ron."

Pansy's eyes widened considerably at the news. "What? Since when? Hey Draco!" she called out.

Ahead of them, Draco turned his head to look over his shoulder as he walked. "Hmm?"

"Are you a prefect now?"

"No, why?"

"Harry said so."

Draco looked at Harry briefly and shrugged. "He's just playing a joke on you, Pansy. I swear, you'll believe anything," he teased.

Pansy turned back to Harry, squinting her eyes at him in mock anger. "Oh, you!" she said, pinching his arm.

"Oww!" Harry said, rubbing the sore spot. He then remembered suddenly that he had left his prefect badge on his nightstand. "I just forgot it, that's all," Harry said, before starting a pinching fight all the way to the Potions classroom.

5. Potions and Confrontations

Harry walked into the potions classroom and sat beside Draco, with Pansy and Tracey Davis sharing the cauldron behind them. Harry chatted with Draco, mostly about Quidditch, while watching the other students file into the room. Admittance to Advanced Potions was dependent on the OWL score; since less than half of the sixth years qualified for the class, the class was a mixture of all houses. Harry spotted Hermione walk into the room, where she took a seat alongside Pavarti. Apparently, none of the Gryffindor boys had qualified, or chose to take, the class. A good number of Ravenclaws showed up, but only one Hufflepuff.

As was his custom, Snape made his usual dramatic entrance into the classroom, banging the door loudly and sweeping grandly to the front of the classroom. As usual, he fixed each and every student with a penetrating stare, which Harry now recognized as a cursory scan of legilimency. Finally, he spoke.

“Welcome to Advanced Potions,” he began. “This class will be very difficult, will move very fast, and will cover a large amount of material. If you thought last year was difficult, I suggest that you leave immediately, as this year will be even tougher.” Snape paused, letting his words sink in. Hannah Abbot, the lone Hufflepuff, squirmed slightly. Harry sensed that Snape would be particularly hard on her, especially since she had no housemates for support; he felt a little sorry for her. “Now then,” Snape said, “let’s see how much you’ve managed to forget over the summer.”

Snape began a ruthless review session over the first period, calling on students at random to answer difficult questions. He took away points from the other houses with glee, and begrudgingly granted them points for correct answers. Of course, as Harry expected, he was inordinately kind and generous to the Slytherins, and it was quite a different feeling being on Snape’s good side. To his surprise, Harry was able to answer all the questions correctly, the answers seeming to spring forth from his mind unbidden. For the second half of class, Snape had them prepare a difficult potion.

Harry was in the middle of dicing the daisy roots when he spotted something out of the corner of his eye. "Wait, Tracey," he said, turning around. "Don't forget to add the mixture *before* the roots."

Tracey and Pansy looked at him with gratitude, Tracey's hand frozen over the cauldron as she was about to add the diced roots to the bubbling potion. "Thanks Harry," she said, quickly putting down the bowl of roots.

"No problem." Harry smiled and turned back to his work, before wondering how he managed to notice their mistake out of the corner of his eye. As his mind wandered, he became aware that his hands were automatically chopping the roots to the correct length and adding the powdered horn of a Graphorn to the cauldron without thinking. Harry remembered back to Pansy's comment in the corridor, realizing not without a measure of smugness that he was actually *good*, great even, at Potions. The class passed quickly, Harry actually enjoying himself as his hands moved deftly about the cauldron. Snape complimented their work, and soon the bell rang signifying the start of lunch.

Harry left the classroom feeling happy. It was quite a change, as usually he was seething after leaving a potions class, upset over Snape's unfairness. He had only taken a few steps down the dungeon corridor when Malfoy nudged him with his elbow.

"Look who's coming," he whispered, pointing back to the doorway of the potions classroom.

"Ah, bucktooth!" Pansy said happily as Hermione walked out of the classroom with Pavarti and Padma. Harry noticed with surprise that Hermione still had her large front teeth. Hadn't Madam Pomfrey shrunken her teeth back in fourth year? Before Harry could react, Malfoy, Pansy, and Tracey quickly moved to surround Hermione. Harry followed quickly.

"Still can't do a thing with that hair, eh Granger?" Tracey asked derisively. Hermione looked angry, and slightly afraid, as Harry walked up. He noticed that some of the other students passing through had stopped to watch. Crabbe and Goyle appeared, apparently meeting Malfoy before going to lunch.

“By Merlin, and those teeth! Still chewing wood I see?” Pansy was saying.

“What do you expect from a mudblood?” Malfoy added.

“Leave her alone! Don’t call her that!” Harry growled.

Malfoy turned around in surprise. “What?”

“I said, leave her alone. And don’t use the word ‘mudblood’ around me ever again,” Harry said menacingly. “Or else,” he added. Looking around, Harry noticed not only did Malfoy look bewildered at Harry’s words, but the entire hallway was silent; everyone, regardless of house, had a look of surprise on their face. Harry was a little confused himself, not by his support of Hermione, but by the two words he added at the end. “Or else.” Those words just slipped out, as if saying them was the most natural thing in the world. What was he thinking? Not only was he surrounded by Slytherins, but Crabbe and Goyle must each outweigh Harry by a good 20 kilograms. Harry looked at Malfoy threateningly and made a show of reaching for his wand, but inwardly he was prepared to receive a nasty beating. To his surprise (Harry was beginning to lose count of the number of times he’s been surprised that day), he saw a flicker of fear pass over Malfoy’s face. Crabbe and Goyle each took a step backwards when they saw Harry reach for his wand.

“Easy Harry, easy. I’m sorry,” Malfoy said softly.

Harry felt a hand on his arm. “We’re sorry Harry. Just calm down, please.” Harry turned and saw Tracey looking at him, a mixture of concern, confusion, and fear on her face. Harry relented and dropped his hand from his wand. The relief of those around him was evident, as several breaths that were being held were released. Harry looked around and saw several people looking at him, some with fear, some with bewilderment. Harry looked at Hermione, and instead of gratitude, he only saw that same fear that everyone else seemed to feel. He had a sudden urge to flee; Harry turned and, using every gram of self-control, forced himself to walk calmly down the corridor and into the Great Hall, leaving the crowd behind him.

Harry sat down miserably at the house table, laying his head on his arms. Harry could understand the confusion. After all, he was, apparently, in Slytherin, and no self-respecting Slytherin would pass an opportunity to insult a Gryffindor, much less defend one. But what bothered him was that all those people seemed afraid of him. Especially Malfoy. The Malfoy Harry knew wouldn't back down from a threat by Harry Potter and would draw his own wand, not apologize. After a moment to collect himself, Harry looked up. The Great Hall was filling up, but no one was sitting by Harry. In fact, people were actively avoiding him, giving him a wide berth and shooting him dirty looks.

"Harry, what the hell do you think you're doing?" he heard. Harry looked up and saw Blaise standing over him. "Why are you sitting at the Gryffindor table?"

Harry looked around, momentarily confused as to why he *shouldn't* be sitting at the Gryffindor table. But one look around at all the hostile faces brought him back to his *present* reality. "Er, lost my head there a moment," he said, standing and following Blaise to the Slytherin table. He sat down across from a number of *very* nervous-looking Slytherins.

Blaise noticed the tension. He put down his fork and looked around. "Alright, what's going on? First Harry sits at the wrong table, then the rest of you look like scared kittens!"

Malfoy, Pansy, and Tracey shared a look. "Well, Harry sorta got...*dark*...after potions," Tracey said.

Blaise looked excited. "Really? On who? Details!" he demanded.

"Well..." Pansy started. "Actually, Harry threatened Draco."

"What?!" Millicent Bulstrode exclaimed, flabbergasted. She looked at Harry. "What happened?"

Harry looked at the faces around him. "Malfoy called Hermione a mudblood. I don't appreciate the word," he said.

“Why not?”

Harry looked at Blaise. “What? You mean you don’t know?” he asked. Looking around, he saw equally blank looks from the other Slytherins. “None of you know?” After a round of shaking heads, Harry mumbled softly, “No, I suppose I wouldn’t have told you.”

“Told us what, Harry?” Daphne said softly.

“My mother is Muggle-born,” Harry said simply. It was as if Harry had just predicted that Hufflepuff House would win the Quidditch cup this year. His revelation was met with stunned silence.

Finally, Blaise gathered his wits. “Huh?”

“That’s right,” Harry said. “My mother is not a pureblood witch. The word mudblood is offensive to me.”

Pansy recovered. “Oh Harry! Why didn’t you tell us earlier?”

“I’m not sure. I guess I was embarrassed to tell you before.”

Malfoy cleared his throat. “Listen Harry, I’m sorry. I didn’t know. I promise I won’t use the word again.”

Harry looked at him a moment, then faced all the Slytherins. They all looked so...contrite that Harry’s anger softened. “I’m sorry too,” he said, “I should have said something years ago, and I shouldn’t have over-reacted like that.”

“It’s ok, Harry,” Daphne said. The others nodded in agreement.

“Just one more thing?” Harry asked. The other waited. “Please leave Hermione alone. We’ve tortured her enough over the years...she’s got it tough enough without us on her back all day,” he added, looking pointedly at Pansy and Tracey. They nodded nervously. “Good!” Harry said. “Now, let’s eat!”

The rest of the Slytherins tentatively filled their plates, and conversation gradually returned to normal.

6. Unexpected Reactions

It became clear that news of what happened in front of the potions classroom circulated quickly during lunch. Harry caught sight of many whispered conversations occurring at the other house tables, with an inordinate number of looks his way. Hermione seemed more popular than usual, with even Ravenclaws and Hufflepuffs going up to her to find out more details. The Slytherins were a little better; even though Harry could see the curiosity written on their faces, they didn't ask him or any of the other sixth-years about the incident.

After lunch, all the sixth-years except for Crabbe, Goyle, and Ted Nott got up to head for Advanced Charms. Crabbe and Goyle were too stupid to get into the class, and Ted chose not to take it; Ted's father owned a chain of wizarding stores, and Ted was going to join the family business after graduation. As Harry left the Great Hall, he looked back and saw a crowd of Slytherins forming around Ted, obviously trying to get the details they couldn't ask for when Harry was around.

Double Advanced Charms was a full class. Professor Flitwick always managed to get a high percentage of students to pass the Charms OWL, so there were three classes instead of just one like Potions. The classes were mixed, with an equal number of all four houses were spread among the three classes, apparently to encourage inter-house relations. Though Hermione wasn't in his Charms class, Harry noticed that the various Gryffindors, Ravenclaws, and Hufflepuffs were looking at him curiously. They also occasionally glanced at the other Slytherins, wondering if the incident had caused any discord within the House. Knowing this, the other Slytherins acted as if nothing had happened, and Malfoy especially made a point of treating Harry normally. Harry ignored the stares (he was becoming quite good at it) and focused instead on the lesson, which he found easier than expected. Although he was still distressed and confused to find himself in Slytherin, Harry found that a side benefit was that he seemed to be doing much better in all his classes.

After class, Millicent appeared at his side and took his arm. "Just ignore them, Harry," she said. Under normal circumstances, Harry would have been appalled to be in physical contact with Millicent

Bulstrode; but this wasn't a normal day by any measure of the word, and Harry felt oddly comforted by the words – it reminded him of the many times Hermione had grabbed his arm in a similar fashion and whispered the same words.

"Millie's right," Malfoy offered. "The others are looking for any excuse to find trouble in Slytherin house."

Pansy nodded her agreement. "C'mon, let's go drop our stuff before dinner," she said, taking Harry's hand and dragging them towards the dungeons.

Harry sat in the Slytherin common room, watching a game of Exploding Snap between Ted and Blaise, while the girls pored over a fashion magazine that Pansy brought from home. He wasn't sure what he was expecting, but Harry always assumed that the Slytherins did more...*diabolical* things than play Exploding Snap and wizard's chess. He envisioned more devious plotting going on, perhaps a Dark Arts book open in the corner as seventh years practiced summoning demons or the like. But instead, everything was just so *normal*, just like the Gryffindor common room except for the colors.

As Harry watched, he couldn't help but feel comfortable and uneasy at the same time. Everything in the Slytherin common room seemed so familiar, yet part of him was screaming at him to get out of there. During the day, Harry had found himself falling into lapses where he felt perfectly at ease with his fellow Slytherins, actually trading jokes with Draco Malfoy where normally he would prefer to strangle him senseless. Even Millicent Bulstrode was pleasant to be around, and Crabbe and Goyle were a lot more good-natured than he believed. But at other times, Harry desperately wanted to flee from the group of Slytherins and find safety among his fellow Gryffindors. Except, they weren't his housemates anymore, were they?. Harry found that he was constantly at odds with himself over who he was and where he belonged.

By dinnertime, Harry had a plan; or at least, a plan that was up to typical Potter-standards, which mostly meant having a general idea and then winging it. During dinner, Harry watched the Gryffindor

table carefully, Hermione Granger in particular. She ate quickly and then left the table with her book bag over her shoulder. Harry got up a second later, feigning tiredness, but feeling happy that his “plan” was going better than expected – less people would notice them now that Hermione left dinner early. He followed her, easily predicting her path to the library – at least some things stayed the same. Harry looked around quickly before moving quickly behind her. He grabbed a hold of her arm and propelled her into an empty classroom. Hermione only had time to emit a squeak of surprise before she was pulled into the classroom.

Harry turned and placed a locking charm on the door. Happy that his plan worked to perfection, Harry turned to face Hermione, a smile on his face. That smile faded abruptly when he saw the look of panic on her face as she backed away into the corner furthest away from him, her wand pointing unsteadily in his general direction.

“Hermione, what are you doing? Put that wand down,” Harry said, walking towards her.

“D-Don’t come a-any closer!” she practically shrieked.

“Hermione, stop being silly. I’m not going to hurt you,” Harry said as soothingly as possible. He took a step forward.

“Stupify!” Hermione cried, a red light springing forth from her wand. Harry instinctively ducked, then stared at Hermione in shock. Hermione sent another blast his way, and Harry dove to the side. This wouldn’t do at all. Harry drew his own wand.

“Expelliarmus” he said quietly, gently, and Harry reached up to catch Hermione’s wand as it flew towards him.

Hermione’s eyes widened, and she started to cry, hugging herself as she sank to the ground in the corner. “Whatever I did, I’m sorry!” she cried in-between sobs. “P-please don’t h-hurt me!” she pleaded.

Harry felt a part of himself die. It broke his heart to see Hermione cry, and seeing her fear of him, knowing that he was the cause of her tears, made it infinitely worse. He knew approaching her would only cause her to panic even more, so he simply sat down where he stood,

putting the two wands in his pocket. "Hermione," he said gently. "I'm not going to hurt you. I would never hurt you. I...I just need to talk to you. I need your help."

"You...you need *my* help?" she asked through her tears.

Harry nodded. "That's right. I have a little mystery to solve, and it probably involves long hours in the library researching arcane subjects. You're the only one for it," he said with an encouraging smile.

Hermione looked at him a moment before letting a small smile grace her lips, though her eyes still revealed her suspicion. Harry breathed in relief – although it was small, a smile was still a smile. Harry knew not to expect her to act the same way *his* Hermione would, but he never expected her to be terrified of him.

"What's...what's the mystery?" she asked, wiping at her nose.

"Well, you're not going to believe this, but just give me a minute to explain," Harry started. He was silent a moment, all of a sudden realizing how difficult it would be to explain his situation. He knew it would be a fantastic story, but he had been confident that Hermione would believe him no matter what. But after seeing her reaction to him, he knew that *this* Hermione wouldn't give him the benefit of the doubt like his own Hermione. "Actually," he said, somewhat embarrassed, "I really have no idea where to begin."

Hermione gave him another smile. "Well, try starting at the beginning," she suggested helpfully, sniffing slightly.

Harry chuckled. "Which beginning?" he asked rhetorically, unconsciously rubbing the back of his head. "Maybe this was a mistake," Harry said, mostly to himself.

"What's a mistake?" Hermione asked, her curiosity evident on her face. "Tell me, maybe I can help."

Harry shook his head, coming to a decision. "No, I don't think you'd believe me. Maybe it'd be best if we just leave," he said, walking towards the door and removing the locking charm.

“Now wait just a second, Harry Potter!” Harry turned in surprise. Hermione had stood and fixed him with a glare, her hands on her hip, poised exactly like the Hermione he knew. The sudden switch from terrified Hermione to curious Hermione to indignant Hermione astounded him. “You think you can just grab me in the hallway and scare me to death, then just leave without any explanation?”

Harry looked at her, momentarily at a loss for words; it was always very hard to resist her when she got angry like this. “I’m sorry that I put you through this Hermione. I really want to tell you, but like I said, you wouldn’t believe me. I’ll just ask Dumbledore.”

“Dumbledore?” Hermione said, looking confused. “But...but Harry, Dumbledore’s dead. You-Know-Who killed him five years ago.”

7. Gryffindor Past

Harry stood rigid, staring uncomprehendingly at Hermione. Dumbledore...dead? He worked his jaw, but no sound would come out. His legs became shaky, and Harry sank to the ground. Dumbledore was dead. Voldemort killed Dumbledore. How could he possibly get things back the way they should be with Dumbledore gone?

"Harry?" he heard Hermione ask tentatively. Harry looked up and saw Hermione a few paces away, her concern over his strange behavior apparently overcoming her fear of him. "What's wrong?"

"What...what happened?"

"What happened what?" Hermione asked, confused.

"Dumbledore. What happened?"

"What do you mean Harry? We were all there when McGonagall made the announcement."

Harry sighed heavily. "Pretend that I wasn't, or that I forgot. Tell me what happened, please."

Harry had drawn his knees to his chest with his arms wrapped around his legs and his head buried. Hermione looked at Harry a moment before sitting near him, but not too close. Harry grimly figured that he looked so miserable that Hermione must no longer consider him a threat, or at least less of one.

"Well," Hermione started. "I suppose it all started at the end of our first year with the Philosopher's Stone, which was being guarded here. The Philosopher's Stone was created by-

Harry waved his hand dismissively. "Nicholas Flamel. I know, I know. How did Dumbledore die?"

Hermione looked a bit miffed at being interrupted, but she continued anyways. "Well, it was the night after exams finished. We all thought You-Know-Who was dead after you...well, you know...but somehow

You-Know-Who managed to get into and steal the Stone. Dumbledore tried to stop him, but You-Know-Who killed him.”

“That’s not right, that’s not right at all,” Harry muttered.

“What’s not right?”

“That’s not how it happened. We stopped him – you, me, and Ron went down there. We got by Fluffy, the vines, the flying keys, the chessboard, the potions...all of it and we stopped Quirrell,” came Harry’s muffled voice.

“Quirrell? You mean Professor Quirrell?” Hermione asked. “Stopped him from what? He was with Dumbledore...he and Dumbledore tried to stop You-Know-Who together. He was found unconscious next to Dumbledore’s body, and he was the first to tell us that You-Know-Who returned.”

At that, Harry’s head snapped up, anger glowing fiercely in his eyes. “Quirrell’s...alive?”

Hermione nodded shakily, clearly unnerved by Harry’s sudden anger. She scrambled to her feet.

“But, how?! Quirrell was working for Voldemort!” Harry said angrily.

Hermione gave a small shriek and backed away. “Don’t say his name!” she hissed. “Professor Quirrell wasn’t working for You-Know-Who...he tried to stop him. He was so traumatized by what happened that he retired, though he was a bit daft before.”

But Harry wasn’t listening. He could clearly remember those moments in first year; they would remain with him forever. Fluffy growling at them; Ron falling on the chessboard; his fear that Hermione had selected the wrong potion; their hug; and most of all, Voldemort’s face sticking out of the back of Quirrell’s head. It was clear in his mind as if it happened yesterday. But suddenly, another memory surfaced, just as certain: Harry sitting at the Slytherin table in the Great Hall, in good spirits as they had won the House Cup; McGonagall appearing and announcing that Dumbledore and Quirrell had been found, Dumbledore dead, Quirrell unconscious. He

remembered that Quirrell was later honored for opposing Voldemort and retired quietly.

What had really happened? Harry remembered, in the past that he knew was true, Hermione telling him that she ran into Dumbledore on the way to get help. In this...*reality*, Dumbledore must have faced Voldemort alone. Voldemort must have gotten his body back, but surely he was weak, and besides, Dumbledore could handle Voldemort even at his peak. It...it must have been Quirrell! Dumbledore must have believed that Quirrell was on his side, and then been betrayed and killed by Quirrell and Voldemort working together.

"This is not how things are supposed to be!" Harry snarled, slamming his fist against the floor. "We stopped him!" A whimper interrupted his angry tirade, and he looked up to see Hermione once again cowering in the corner. Harry immediately felt his anger deflate. "Oh Merlin, Hermione, I'm sorry," he said. "I...it's just that everything's so different now. Vol-You-Know-Who doesn't come back until our fourth year."

"Our f-fourth year? What happened in our fourth year?"

"Moody, I mean Barty Crouch Jr., kidnapped me and Cedric after the Third Task. Wormtail killed Cedric and used my blood to resurrect Vol, er, You-Know-Who."

Hermione looked positively bewildered. "What are you talking about? Is this some kind of trick? What's a Third Task? Who's Barty Crouch Jr and Wormtail? And do you mean Cedric Diggory? Cedric's not dead; he graduated last year." (**A/N:** at least I think he would have, if he was still alive...I don't have the book to double-check.)

"Cedric's not dead?" Harry asked. "But I-" Harry stopped to remember a different version of fourth year. "There was no Triwizard tournament, was there?" Hermione shook her head. "Everything's so different now," Harry said, slumping to the ground and lying down, feeling drained by the onslaught of realizations and new memories. "I don't know what's real anymore," he said despondently.

Hermione cautiously stood and made her way to him. Once again, she must have decided that Harry posed no threat, for she carefully sat next to him, just out of arm's reach. "Are you feeling OK Harry? Should I get Madam Pomfrey?"

Harry shook his head as he stared at the ceiling. "Madam Pomfrey can't fix this."

"Fix what, Harry? What's going on?"

After a period of silence, Harry turned to look up at her. "If I tell you something, can you promise to keep an open mind? It'll sound crazy, but please try and believe me."

Hermione looked at him, visibly making her decision. "OK," she said simply.

Harry let out a deep breath and pulled himself to a sitting position. "Like you said, I guess I should start at the beginning. Essentially, yesterday, I went to bed a Gryffindor, and this morning, I woke up a Slytherin."

Hermione stared a moment, before letting out a sharp laugh. "Right..." she said.

"Please, let me finish," he pleaded.

"OK, finish then," she said skeptically.

"Everything's different now. It's like I have two sets of memories in my head. One where I'm a Gryffindor, and one where I'm a Slytherin," Harry began. "In my Gryffindor memories, I begged the Sorting Hat *not* to put me in Slytherin. We were best friends Hermione; you, me, and Ron were the best of friends after the troll incident. We stopped Voldemort – er, sorry – from stealing the Philosopher's Stone. We solved the mystery of the Chamber of Secrets. We saved Sirius using the time turner. There was a Triwizard tournament in our fourth year, and just last year we went to the Department of Mysteries and battled with Death Eaters."

"Hmm," Hermione said. "That sounds very exciting, Harry. We sure did do a lot of things," she said, failing to hide the disbelief on her face.

Harry ignored her and continued. "But my Slytherin memories are different. I...I was sorted into Slytherin for some reason. We didn't stop You-Know-Who in our first year, and Dumbledore died because of it. There was no Triwizard tournament in our fourth year, and all the other years are fuzzy; it's like pieces of my memory are missing!" he said frustrated.

"Well, that's a very nice story..." Hermione said, nervously standing up. "I'll see what I can find out in the library," she continued in an anxious voice as she edged her way to the door.

"You don't believe me, do you?" Harry gave a rueful chuckle. "Heck, I wouldn't believe me either."

"No, no, I believe you," Hermione said quickly. "I'll go to the library straight-away to find out what happened."

"Please, you *have* to believe me Hermione!" Harry said desperately. "You've always been there for me before; I can't do this alone!"

Hermione paused, seeing Harry's obvious distress. "Well, you have to admit that it is a rather fantastic story."

Harry nodded. "I just wish there was some way to convince you."

"Well, maybe there is," Hermione said. Harry looked at her hopefully. Hermione sat down again. "Tell me more about the world you remember. You said we were best friends. Start by telling about the Hermione in *your* world."

Harry smiled. "Well, *my* Hermione started out as quite a bossy know-it-all," Harry said. Then, spotting the offended look on Hermione's face, he quickly added, "you have to remember, Hermione and I are the best of friends. I actually remember her bossiness with fondness. You were only eleven, after all."

Hermione looked partially mollified. "Continue."

"Ok, well, she was always sticking her nose in our business at the beginning of first year and always focused on school and following the rules. Once," Harry said with a chuckle, "she had followed Ron and I after hours, and the three of us met Fluffy, the three-headed dog. We almost died that night, but all you, er, I mean my Hermione, could say was that we were almost expelled."

Hermione gave a soft laugh. "Sounds like something I would have said back in first year."

Harry grinned at her. "Then, the famous troll incident. After Quirrell let in the troll at Halloween-"

"Professor Quirrell let in the troll?" Hermione interrupted, surprised.

Harry nodded. "Yes, he tried to use the troll as a distraction so he could steal the Philosopher's Stone, but Snape intercepted him before he could get to Fluffy."

Hermione shook his head. "I'm still having a hard time believing that Professor Quirrell had anything to do with You-Know-Who. But continue...what did the troll have anything to do with me?"

"Well, you had hid yourself in the girls' bathroom that night-"

"What? Why would I do that?"

Harry laughed. "You interrupt a lot," he said teasingly. Hermione blushed slightly. "Anyways, you had overheard Ron making fun of you, and you were crying in the girls' bathroom." He ignored Hermione's tut of disapproval and continued. "Ron and I went looking for you to warn you, but the troll had cornered you in the bathroom. I distracted the troll by jumping on it, and Ron knocked it out with its own club using the levitation spell. Then, the teachers came in, and you covered for us, taking the blame. After that, the three of us were best friends."

Hermione smiled. "Well, that sounds nice. Not the troll almost killing me part, but the rest of it."

Harry agreed. "After that, we managed to loosen you up a bit about breaking rules, and you kept on us about doing our homework and studying. I think it worked out best for everyone."

"And the three of us went after the Philosopher's Stone?"

Harry nodded. "We thought it was Snape after the Stone, when in actuality it was Quirrell, so it was a bit of a surprise."

"I imagine so," Hermione said, still obviously trying to decide whether she believed that Quirrell was working for Voldemort.

"Anyways, second year was just as exciting. You see, the spirit of You-Know-Who had possessed Ginny and made her open the Chamber of Secrets, and-"

"Wait a minute. Ginny? Ginny Weasley? Ginny opened the Chamber of Secrets?"

"You know about the Chamber of Secrets?"

"Of course! Students were petrified, and Ginny was kidnapped. You had somehow found her and saved her..." Hermione broke off suddenly, looking very anxious.

"What? What is it?" Harry asked.

"Well, I don't know why I'm nervous saying this, since you were there and all, but a lot of people thought, and some still think, that *you* opened the Chamber."

"Because of the Parseltongue when I dueled Malfoy?"

"Well, in a way. You spoke Parseltongue at a duel, but it wasn't you against Malfoy. Malfoy was dueling Dean Thomas and sent a snake after him. You spoke to the snake."

Harry nodded. "Basically the same, then. Everyone thought I was the Heir of Slytherin in my memory too. I was absolutely miserable, and only your and Ron's friendship kept me going."

Hermione shook her head. "I remember it very differently. You practically reveled in it; you never said you were the Heir of Slytherin, but you never denied it. Slytherin House used it to their great advantage."

Harry closed his eyes, rubbing his temples with his hand. It was true; Harry remembered strutting along the corridors with his fellow Slytherins, bullying students left and right. "But then why would I bother to rescue Ginny in this world?" he quietly asked himself. Then the answer came, the same reason Tom Riddle had years ago decided to seal the Chamber; the school was about to be closed, and Harry had nowhere else to go. "Things are so different," he said in a normal voice. "In my world, you had discovered that it was a basilisk that was using the pipes to roam the school-"

"A basilisk!" Hermione exclaimed. "Yes, that would explain it," she added thoughtfully.

Harry grinned at her. "Stop interrupting. Anyways, in this world I must have somehow figured it out myself. I seem to be a lot smarter in this world than in my own," Harry said with a wry smile.

Hermione chuckled. "Let's not go too far," she said teasingly. "I can't wait to hear what happened in third year."

"Well, in third year, Sirius Black," Harry's face clouded for a second, "escaped from Azkaban prison. They had Dementors at Hogwarts, because everyone was afraid he was coming after me. In reality, he was after Wormtail, I mean Peter Pettigrew, but Sirius was captured. You and I used your time-turner to save Sirius using Buckbeak."

During Harry's summary of third year, Hermione's face had gone from initial interest, to distaste at Sirius Black's name and Dementors, to curiosity about Peter Pettigrew. But her face paled at the end. "How...how did you know about the time-turner?"

Harry glanced at her. "Remember? In my world we're best friends. You actually kept it a secret from me until the end of term when we used it together."

Hermione shook her head. "This is too weird..."

"You're telling me," Harry agreed. "We even flew a hippograff together to save Sirius."

"Well, that's definitely a difference. You couldn't pay me to fly a broom, much an animal. But why would we save Sirius Black? He's You-Know-Who's second-in-command!"

"He was framed. Sirius was thought to be my parent's secret keeper, but at the last minute he switched with Peter. Peter betrayed my parents to Voldemort, oops, sorry, and framed Sirius."

"But...Peter Pettigrew. Didn't he die fourteen years ago? He's a hero!"

"No," Harry said darkly. "He was working for You-Know-Who all along. He was an Animagus and tricked everyone into thinking Sirius killed him and the others."

Hermione sighed. "First Professor Quirrell, now Peter Pettigrew and Sirius Black. This is getting to be too much!" Then she grew thoughtful. "But if what you're saying is true, then Sirius shouldn't be in Azkaban."

"Sirius is still in Azkaban? He's alive?" Harry said, surprised. "He never broke out when he saw Scabbers?"

"Scabbers? What does Ron's rat have to do with anything?"

"Scabbers is Peter Pettigrew...it's his Animagus form. Waitamminute, is Scabbers still here?"

Hermione shook her head. "Ron lost him at the end of first year, right after the Leaving Feast."

Harry thought a moment. "I suppose it makes sense," he said, mostly to himself. "Wormtail would have gone to You-Know-Who once he got his body back, and not with Ron to Egypt, which meant that Sirius never saw his picture in the paper." A little louder, he added, "so Sirius is still in Azkaban?"

“Yes.”

Harry was unsure how to feel about that. Part of him was elated that Sirius was still alive, but was he really any better off? Which was preferable: to be dead, or to be imprisoned in Azkaban? If he couldn't return to his own world, as Harry had come to think of it, then he would have to find a way to free Sirius. “Sirius is my godfather,” Harry said finally.

“Oh,” was all Hermione could say.

“Yeah, he bought me a Firebolt for Christmas to make up for all the Christmas presents he didn't get to give me while in prison.”

“Wow, those are expensive.”

Harry nodded. “Actually, it was an anonymous gift at the time, since we still thought he was guilty. But you suspected it was from Sirius, and you had McGonagall confiscate it. Ohhhh, Ron and I were so mad at you. We blamed you for the loss of our beloved Firebolt.” Harry smiled at the memory.

Hermione laughed. “I can only imagine! Though, I'm surprised I had the guts to do such a thing, knowing that the two of you would be so angry with me.”

“Well, that's the way you are, Hermione,” Harry said seriously. “You always do what you believe is the right thing. Besides, we weren't mad for long, only a month or so. And we knew, or at least I knew, that you meant well, that you had my best interests at heart.” Harry smiled, and the two locked eyes for a moment.

“What about fourth year,” Hermione said, breaking their gaze.

Harry cleared his throat. “Um, well, in our fourth year we had the Triwizard Tournament. Have you read about it?” Hermione nodded, which elicited a grin. “I should have figured. Anyways, our new Defense Against the Dark Arts teacher was actually a servant of Voldemort using a Polyjuice potion. To make a long story short, Cedric and I were portkeyed away. Pettigrew killed Cedric and used my blood to resurrect Vol, er, You-Know-Who.”

“How did you and Cedric both become champions? I thought it was one per school.”

“Oh yeah. The fake Defense Against the Dark Arts teacher bewitched the Goblet of Fire and made it so I was selected. Ron thought I had done it myself, and he was really mad at me. In fact, most of the school thought I was just trying to get more attention, so I was basically an outcast, like in second year.”

Hermione gave him a sympathetic look. “I’m sorry, I understand how it feels to be left out,” she said.

Harry looked at her. “But *you* still believed in me, Hermione. Even though the whole school was against me, you stood by me when no one else would. If not for your friendship, I don’t know what I would have done.”

Hermione blushed slightly, and then quickly changed the subject. “So, in your world, You-Know-Who didn’t come back until our fourth year, while here, he came back at the end of our first year.” Harry nodded. “So, what happened in fifth year?”

Harry’s expression darkened. “Fifth year was hard,” he said. “A lot of bad things happened that’s hard to talk about. (**A/N:** but mostly my fingers are tired of typing) But I will say that you were there by my side the whole time, and you really helped me to come to terms with what happened,” he said earnestly, instinctively reaching for her hand. Hermione sat still for a moment as they looked at each other, until she jumped slightly when she seemed to realize that Harry was holding her hand. Harry noticed her reaction, and quickly released her. “I’m sorry,” he said. “It’s just so easy to forget that you’re not *my* Hermione.”

“It’s ok,” Hermione said flustered. “You’re Hermione sounds wonderful. In a way, it’s slightly reassuring - I’ve often wondering why I was sorted into Gryffindor, and the Hermione you know sounds very brave.”

“She is,” Harry agreed. “But you are the same person. If given the chance, I know you’d act the same way.”

Hermione laughed. "I don't think so."

"No, it's true," Harry insisted. "You're the same person, just different events happened in your life, but inside, you're the same Hermione."

Hermione regarded him dubiously. "If you say so, Harry Potter."

"I do." A comfortable silence descended upon the two. "So," Harry said, "that was a quick summary of the past five years. I'm not sure what else to tell you to convince you that I'm telling the truth."

"I'm not sure why, but for some reason, I do believe you," Hermione said, causing Harry's face to brighten. "I figure there are three possibilities. One, you're telling the truth. Two, you've gone crazy or have been cursed and only *believe* you're telling the truth. And three, you're the best actor in the world. I choose to believe number one. Besides, you acting so differently right now, I can't help but think something significant must have happened."

Harry looked at her gratefully. "Thank you, Hermione," he said, his voice breaking slightly. "You don't know how much it means to me to have you on my side." Giving in to an impulse, Harry leaned over and embraced Hermione. She stiffened at first, before wrapping her arms around him.

Suddenly, the door of the room burst open and a crowd of people entered, wands drawn.

"Get away from her!"

8. The End of a Long Day

As soon as Harry heard the door open forcefully, he spun around, instinctively shielding Hermione's body with his own and drawing his wand in one fluid motion. He slowly backed away from the door, his left arm gently guiding Hermione behind him while his wand remained trained on the open door. His mind began to analyze the situation as people started rushing in.

Ron Weasley: above-average magical power, but severely handicapped by his limited knowledge and mastery of spells. Also tends to have bad aim, making him a secondary threat.

Dean Thomas: average magical power. Adequate knowledge, but his slow and deliberate spellcasting makes him a tertiary threat.

Seamus Finnigan: below-average magical power. Should be able to withstand his spells fairly easily, though can eventually be worn down by constant attacks. Still, not overly worrisome.

Lavender Brown: high magical power, but almost criminally underdeveloped. Easily startled; probably will not be able to duel well under pressure.

Colin Creevey: below-average magical power. Short stature makes him a difficult target. More of a nuisance, as usual.

Neville Longbottom: below-average magical power, below-average magical skill, at least when it comes to dueling. Appears to be very nervous, and is the least threatening of the lot.

Natalie MacDonald: average magical power. Level of magical knowledge is unknown. Classified as a secondary threat due to the unknown factor.

Parvati Patil: average magical power, adequate knowledge of spells. Her aim is somewhat erratic, but she still ranks as a secondary threat.

Ginny Weasley: above-average magical power, impressive knowledge of spells. Deliberate spellcaster, but not slow. Primary threat.

“Get away from her!” Ron snarled, leveling his wand at Harry’s chest as the others fanned out around him.

Harry watched calmly as the nine Gryffindors burst into the room - all the sixth year Gryffindors along with a couple of fifth years. It was Nine against one, yet Harry felt oddly unafraid with the situation, already strategizing his first move, which would be taking out the primary threat. Protecting Hermione from injury would complicate matters, but if he was able to somehow-

“Just what do you think you’re doing, Ronald Weasley?!” Hermione demanded behind him, interrupting his thoughts. Hermione’s angry outburst seemed to confuse her self-proclaimed rescuers. Ron face betrayed his unease, but he recovered quickly.

“What does it look like? Getting you away from *him*!”

“And what makes you think I *want* to get away from Harry?” Hermione demanded.

That definitely confused them “Erm, well, I mean, he’s Harry Potter!” Ron said somewhat lamely.

“And? I am perfectly capable of defending myself,” Hermione said, apparently forgetting how she was disarmed earlier, “and besides, Harry hasn’t even done anything!”

“I’m sorry Hermione,” Ginny said quickly, noticing her friend’s anger. “It’s my fault. I was looking for you to help me in Arithmancy, but I couldn’t find you. I asked Ron, and he used the *thing* to find you. When saw that you were alone with Harry, we got worried.”

Hermione snorted. “Apparently so. What, you couldn’t find any third years to help?”

Ron blushed slightly. “We were just looking out for you, Herms.” Lavender and Pavarti nodded behind him.

“Well, thank you for your concern, really, but I’m fine,” Hermione said more gently. “And don’t call me Herms!”

“Are you sure *Hermione*? I mean, it’s *Harry Potter*,” Neville said uncertainly. Harry fixed him with a glare, and Neville shrank under his scrutiny. Dean and Seamus pointed their wands at Harry in response.

“I’m sure,” Hermione said firmly, noticing the tension. “Ginny, I’ll help you with your Arithmancy now, ok?” Hermione walked around Harry and purposefully stood in front of him, shielding him from the others.

Ginny nodded, understanding. “Ok, let’s go.” She gestured at the other Gryffindors, and one-by-one they left the room, a few suspicious glances sent at Harry. Hermione watched until they left, then started to follow them out.

“Hermione, wait-” Harry started.

“It’s ok, Harry,” Hermione said, turning. “I still believe you. I just need a little time to think things over. We’ll talk again.” Hermione gave him a genuine smile before leaving the classroom.

Harry wandered the halls afterwards. He knew he wasn’t in the mood to return to the Slytherin common room just yet, so instead Harry decided to take a walk outside. It was September, and the days were getting shorter, but there was still a smattering of light in the sky, at least for another hour or so. Harry stood by the lake, comforted that at least the grounds were still the same. That thought suddenly reminded him of Hagrid, and his mood lifted somewhat. Harry looked over to his old friend’s hut. There was light on, and smoke rising from the chimney, so Harry decided to pay his old friend a visit.

Harry crossed the grounds and approached Hagrid’s home. He knocked on the door, and was rewarded with the sound of barking. Harry smiled, thinking of the slobbering dog, and he heard Hagrid trying to calm his hound.

"Hullo Hagrid," Harry said happily when he saw Hagrid large head poke through the door, Hagrid's enormous leg holding back Fang.

"Harry!? What're you doing here?" (**A/N:** sorry, but I just can't write Hagrid's accent. I can't even speak it, so I have no chance of writing it)

Harry paused, taken aback by Hagrid's surprised reaction. "Er, just wanted to stop by and say hi."

"Er, Ok then," Hagrid said, looking around nervously. "Hi there."

Harry noticed that Hagrid did not move at all. Normally he would have ushered Harry inside his cozy hut with a warm smile, but instead Hagrid seemed to be very wary, almost suspicious, of Harry. "Well, great then," Harry said, feeling depressed. Harry could plainly see the distress he was causing the half-giant, and he politely excused himself and headed back to the castle. It seems in his new world, Hagrid wasn't the friend he was in his own.

Harry again took to wandering the halls in a very gloomy mood. Part of him had believed that all of this was some kind of dream. But his talk with Hermione made it all real, and not only that, Harry was beginning to realize that being Slytherin wasn't the only thing different in this new world. Dumbledore was dead, and Voldemort had come back three years earlier. Harry stopped suddenly, all of a sudden wondering what else was different. Was Voldemort still trying to kill him? Harry didn't think so; as far as he could remember (which wasn't a lot, mind you), he had no recollections of being in mortal peril aside from the Chamber of Secrets. What was different in this reality that prevented Voldemort from trying to finish what he started all those years ago in Godric's Hollow? What has Voldemort been up to over the past five years? Everything at Hogwarts seemed so normal (aside from his new house), but surely Voldemort's activities must have an impact on Hogwarts somehow. And how did Dumbledore's death impact everything? Harry's mind swirled with unresolved questions, and he cursed his mind's inability to recollect the past. It seemed it took a prod, like Hermione's questions, to bring forth his memories of this world.

Harry's mood only darkened as he walked the corridors, caused by the fearful looks he received from the students he passed. They were all afraid of him, he knew. That's why *nine* Gryffindors came to rescue Hermione; Ron and Ginny were too afraid of him to come without reinforcements. Harry smiled at the thought, feeling smug. But once he recognized the feeling, the sense of triumph, he quickly it wiped away. Why would he take pleasure it inspiring fear in others? Harry began to realize that not only did he have another set of memories, but he also had another personalities that, although not very different from each other, seemed to revel in his Slytherin side.

"Mr. Potter, a word, if you please." Harry turned around and saw Professor McGonagall standing behind him, beckoning him into an empty classroom. But Harry remembered now that she wasn't Professor McGonagall anymore. She was Headmistress now, and Professor...Scott, that's his name...has been the Transfiguration instructor since his second year.

"Yes Professor," Harry said and followed her. He looked at her expectantly, waiting for her to speak first.

"I have just spoken to a number of Gryffindor students who their expressed concerns about you. They were under the impression that you had Ms. Granger held against her will in an empty classroom."

Harry stared at her. "That's not true at all, Professor! You can ask Hermione, we were just talking! I would never hurt her!"

McGonagall raised her palms. "Relax, Mr. Potter. I know; I have already spoken to Ms. Granger, and she assures me that nothing of the sort took place."

Harry looked at her confused. "Then, why are you talking to me about it?"

"I only tell you because...well, because, I...frankly, I wanted to, um..."

Harry had never before seen his normally strict and composed Transfigurations professor (as he knew her) so utterly at a loss for words. If not for the subject, he would have found the situation very humorous. "I understand Professor," Harry said. For a moment, he

considered telling her everything that he had told Hermione, but he stopped himself. Professor McGonagall was clearly worried that Harry had some dastardly plan against Hermione Granger or Gryffindor House up his sleeve, and despite being the head of his House and in the Order, Harry had never felt completely at ease with Professor McGonagall in his own world, much less his new one. "Please believe me when I say I mean absolutely no harm towards Hermione. In fact, I want know her better, to be her friend."

McGonagall raised one eyebrow skeptically. "To be her friend?"

Harry nodded, trying to appear as sincere as possible. "Honest, Professor."

McGonagall regarded him a moment before sighing. "Very well, Potter. You may go." Harry nodded and left the classroom. It was, in retrospect, a rather troubling conversation: what kind of person was the Harry of this world that would make McGonagall so suspicious of him? Harry grimaced as he entered the dungeons; he had to know more about the person he was now. Hopefully his memory would clear up, or he had to have another long talk with Hermione. After giving the password, Harry entered the Slytherin common room. Most of the fifth and seventh years were either studying here or in the library, having to worry about OWLs and NEWTs, respectively. The students in the other years were mostly lounging about, and he heard his name called as soon as he entered. Looking over, he spotted Pansy running up to him.

"Harry! Where have you been? You better hurry or we'll be late for the meeting!" Pansy must have caught his blank look, for she clarified. "Hello? Prefect meeting? Sheesh Harry, you've sure been in a funny mood all day. Get your badge and let's go."

That's right, he was a prefect. Harry nodded and ran to his dorm room and spotted the glistening badge on his nightstand. He quickly grabbed it and pinned it on as he returned to the common room, where Pansy waited along with the two fifth year prefects. "Sorry about that," Harry said sheepishly. "Everyone ready?"

Pansy nodded as the two fifth years traded nervous glances. "Julie and Andrew already left. Let's go." Harry followed her into the

dungeons, and they chatted amiably as they walked, hoping that the new Head Boy and Girl weren't as boring as last year and that the meeting would be over quickly. It's been a long day.

9. Adjusting

Harry walked into the classroom that would serve as the Prefect meeting room and looked around. He saw that, despite Pansy's fears, they still had a few minutes before the meeting would begin (that Pansy, always afraid of being late). Harry walked over to the table of refreshments that had been set up, pouring himself a goblet of pumpkin juice and making a small plate of snacks. Turning around, Harry observed the room. Almost all the prefects were there, fifth through seventh years. The Head Girl, a Ravenclaw, was already seated at the table, apparently going over a few notes; the Head Boy was nowhere to be seen. What stood out, though, was the fact that all of the houses were mingling freely with one another, all except for the Slytherins. Hufflepuff talked with Ravenclaw, Gryffindor with Hufflepuff, but the Slytherins all kept to themselves. Harry had always known how separate the Slytherins were from the rest of the school, but standing on the other side, as a Slytherin himself, he realized that it made him a little sad. Harry spotted Hermione and Ginny sitting at the table, talking with Hannah Abbott. He saw Ernie Macmillan walk up behind them and say something to Hannah, and then the two Hufflepuffs left. Harry finished his drink and ambled over to where Hermione and Ginny sat. "Hello," he said as pleasantly as he could. "Mind if I sit here?"

"Certainly, please do," Hermione said, smiling up at him. Ginny simply looked shocked and was rendered speechless. Harry looked her thoughtfully. He knew that the Ginny of his world had a crush on him that only went away last year. How did this Ginny regard him? The Harry she knew wasn't as noble as before, and being in Slytherin probably could make most girls lose their crushes. But then again, he was still Harry Potter, the Boy-Who-Lived, and some girls liked the 'bad boy' image. Harry decided to test her out.

Harry flashed Ginny his best smile. "And how are you doing Ginny?" Harry was rewarded when a deep crimson blush spread throughout her face, and suddenly Ginny found her hands terribly interesting. She managed to murmur an "Ok." Harry wondering how far he could push her, how much fun he could have. Sixth year so far looked to be a rather boring one; there were no standardized tests to study for, and classes were seemed easy so far. It would be amusing

to toy with her emotions for a little while, to see how far she was willing to go and what she would do for him. Plus, it would have the added benefit of angering the insufferable git of a brother she had-

Harry blinked rapidly and shook his head, trying to clear his mind of those thoughts. This was *Ginny*, the girl who unquestioningly offered her aid and support to him last year. Plus, Ron's no git; he's Harry's best friend! Hermione noticed his sudden discomfort (Ginny still had her eyes focused downward). "Are you alright Harry?"

"Yes. I just feel a little...different, you know what I mean?"

Hermione nodded. "Yes Harry, I do understand."

Harry saw in her eyes that she still believed him, even after having time to consider his rather incredible tale, and that knowledge filled with such a sense of relief that it took every gram of self control to refrain from hugging her. Instead, he simply said, "Thanks."

Before she could respond (or Ginny could inquire about their odd behavior), Dean Thomas walked by. "Hi Hermione, Ginny, Harry." He almost continued on his way before pausing suddenly and giving Harry a double take.

Harry gave him a smile. "Hello Dean."

"Er, Hi...Harry," Dean said nervously, before scurrying off. Harry gave Hermione an impish wink, which caused her to give him a stern look before letting loose a soft giggle. Finally, the Head Boy finally made an appearance and the meeting began. Harry settled into his chair, enjoying the close proximity to his best friend as they turned their attention to the Head Boy and Girl.

Harry awoke the next morning, reaching out blindly to stop his alarm clock from ringing. He lay in bed a moment, afraid to put on his glasses and see where he was – he still hoped that it was all an intricate dream.

"C'mon Potter, get up lazybones. I hope you're in a better mood today."

Draco Malfoy's voice dashed away all hopes that he was still a Gryffindor. Harry groaned loudly, partly in frustration at his predicament, and partly because he wanted to go back to sleep. "I'm up, I'm up," he said wearily. Harry dragged himself out of bed and began his morning ritual. Yesterday, Harry had blearily gone about his routine, not noticing his surroundings yet subconsciously understanding that something was different. This morning, Harry paid attention. He marveled at how his body and mind worked, somehow able to find the bathroom, wash-up, and get ready in a place he'd really never been before. He found his school uniform and robes easily, despite never having known where he put them. Harry decided that from that moment, he would try and no longer be surprised by his behavior and his new life.

At breakfast, Harry soon became aware of a number of odd looks that he was getting. While normally this would not have bothered him, being quite used to the phenomenon, the fact was that his fellow Slytherins were the ones throwing him odd looks, and that did bother him. Finally, he could take no more. "What?" he growled. His sudden outburst startled the Slytherins. Harry felt his irritation grow as he watched them trade uncertain looks. "What's going on?" he demanded.

By some unseen agreement, it was apparently decided that Daphne would speak for them. "Nothing's going on, Harry," she said in that soothing voice Harry had come to recognize. "It's just that..well..."

"It's just that what?"

"Well, you've been acting a little...off. First, you threatened poor Draco here and told us to leave a Gryffindor alone. Next, we hear about your confrontation with the Gryffindors last night, and then Pansy said you were awfully chummy with Granger and little Weasley at the prefect meeting." Harry looked at Pansy, who hid her face. "You just seem a little different, that's all. We're concerned."

Harry looked at her and felt his anger dissipate somewhat at her earnest face. Harry honestly didn't know what to say at that

moment. He knew he couldn't tell them the truth; they would either think he was nutters, or that he was a traitor to Slytherin House. He also didn't know how they felt about Voldemort. Although many of their parents were Death Eaters (at least in his world), that didn't necessarily mean that they were. Harry somehow sensed that he wasn't Voldemort's target, and if his sudden realization became public knowledge, that might change. At the same time, Harry did have to admit that his recent behavior would be considered strange coming from someone who took perverse pleasure in being thought of as the Heir of Slytherin. He had to think of a reason that would satisfy his concerned friends as well as any Death Eater spies. Inspiration hit.

"Ah, I see," Harry said. "I suppose it does look a little fishy." Several nodding heads followed his comment. Harry lowered his voice, causing everyone to lean-in. "Let's just say I'm working on a project that requires Granger's participation."

"What kind of project?"

"None of your business," Harry said, fixing the questioner with a deadly gaze. Harry figured since people were already afraid of him, he might as well use it to his advantage.

Blaise finally broke the uneasy silence. "Why Granger?"

"No offense, but she's the smartest witch or wizard here by far. She's the only one who can help."

Murmurs and nods of agreement followed, some begrudgingly. "So that's why you're being nice to her?" Tracey asked.

"Yes, and the best way to ruin my plans is to talk about it," Harry said threateningly, fixing each Slytherin with a glare. None could meet his eyes for long.

"Ok Harry," Malfoy said, looking convinced though nervous. "We knew you'd have a good reason."

Harry relaxed his features, decreasing the tension at the table considerably. "Good then. Now, could someone pass me the potatoes?"

The rest of the day went quickly. To his pleasant surprise, Harry found he also had a knack for Transfiguration, previously one of his most difficult classes. Harry also found he still had his affinity for Defense Against the Dark Arts, but he was disturbed, rather than pleased: Harry found he possessed a rather extensive amount of knowledge about the Dark Arts, not simply Defense Against. As Professor Scott introduced a new facet about the Dark Arts, Harry realized he already knew all about it. This created a train of thoughts that led to other Dark Arts subjects not yet covered in class, but subjects that Harry knew about nonetheless. Harry thought that this, perhaps, could help to explain why he was so...feared. After the last class of the day, Ted tapped Harry on the arm. "Up for a little flying before dinner?"

Harry looked at Ted and grinned. It had been a very long time since he'd been on a broom, and flying seemed like the perfect way to get his mind off his present troubles. "Sure thing."

"Great! I'll get Blaise and Malfoy. Meet us by the Quidditch pitch." Ted scurried off.

Harry went to his dorm room and went through his trunk. No broom. Harry sat a moment, stumped. Surely he had to have some kind of broom, right? Maybe not a Firebolt, but something... Harry looked around and had a sudden fit of inspiration, or maybe a memory came to him. Harry dove under his bed and pulled out a broom. Ah, a Nimbus 2001! Harry remembered the day Malfoy's father had purchased Nimbus 2001s for the entire Quidditch team; though, instead of remembering the moment with shock and disgust, Harry remembered feeling elated and grateful. Harry grabbed the broom and raced outside, where he found Blaise already flying lazy loops in the sky. Harry mounted his broom and flew towards him, where they quickly fell into a race around the pitch. Harry had built a nice lead on him by the time Malfoy and Ted flew up to meet them,

Quaffle in hand. The four friends began a game of catch, tossing the Quaffle amongst them as they talked about random things – classes, Quidditch, and girls.

Through it all, Harry felt a strange sense of belonging. Even in Gryffindor, Harry never truly felt a part of his House. True, he was completely at ease around Ron and Hermione, and even with the rest of the Weasleys. But among the other Gryffindors, he felt somehow separate. He was still the Boy-Who-Lived, sometimes hero, sometimes crazy, and the wildly swinging views of him, even by his own house, prevented him from feeling truly comfortable, as if saying the wrong thing or doing something might make everyone fear or hate him again. But in Slytherin, he seemed accepted. Maybe it was simply because he didn't have to worry about how he was perceived since he was a Slytherin, or maybe it was because he was never the target of a smear campaign by the Daily Prophet, but either way, Harry found himself feeling freer to act himself than he ever had before. Harry almost dropped the Quaffle when he realized that a part of him, and not just the part that was from this world, actually liked Slytherin life better.

Harry and the others returned to the ground to head in for dinner. Harry felt better about himself than he had in a long while. He found that the troubles that plagued him – Cedric; Sirius; the constant threat of Voldemort – no longer constantly occupied his thoughts. Harry began to wonder if he really wanted things back the way they were, and then immediately felt ashamed at the thought. As Harry ate dinner, he spotted Colin Creevey sitting next to Hermione, who was hiding her irritation quite well, but not well enough for Harry not to notice. Harry grinned to himself, deciding, just this once, to indulge his Slytherin tendencies. Malfoy noticed his grin.

“What’s so funny, Harry?”

“Just decided to have a little bit of fun with the Gryffindors,” Harry said mysteriously as he stood. The rest of the sixth years watched with curiosity as he approached the Gryffindor table. Harry noticed that Hermione kept a space clear between herself and Colin, trying to preserve her personal space. That, of course, would serve Harry well. He walked behind the two Gryffindors and put his foot between

them, resting his elbow on his knees. "Hi Hermione," he said smoothly with his back to Colin, completely ignoring the younger boy. Then, Harry carelessly turned his face towards Colin, as if he suddenly realized that he was there. "Mind if I sit?" he asked. Harry almost laughed aloud at the look of terror in Colin's eyes. Colin managed a feeble nod and scooted over. Harry continued to look at him, until Colin finally got the idea: he stood, leaving his mostly full dinner plate, and found a seat further down the table. Harry took the recently vacated seat and grinned mischievously at Hermione.

"That wasn't very nice, Harry," Hermione said in a quiet, reprimanding voice.

Harry was actually relieved to be lectured – it meant that Hermione had lost her fear of him. He put on his best "hurt" look. "I was only doing it for you, Hermione. I could tell you needed relief. Besides, I figured I had to find *some* benefit to being in Slytherin."

Hermione glared at him, before a slight twitching at the corners of her mouth gave her away. She sighed before turning back to her dinner. "What am I going to do with you?" she asked rhetorically.

Harry decided to answer anyways. "Meet me later?" he whispered. "I still have things I want to know, like who I am here."

Hermione looked at him, and Harry could tell she was deciding between studying and meeting him, factoring in the amount of homework she had and how far ahead she had been reading. He smiled; the same Hermione. "Ok," she said. Meet me in the unused classroom by the Charms classroom after dinner."

Harry nodded happily. "I'll see you there." Then, Harry couldn't resist. He looked over at a very scared-looking fourth year. "Can you pass me the pumpkin juice?" he asked innocently. All the color, what was left of it, seemed to drain away from the boy's face. He stuttered something incomprehensible before reaching out with a shaking hand to pitcher of pumpkin juice. As Harry suspected, the boy was too nervous and proceeded to knock over the pitcher, spilling the contents all over the table as well as a few Gryffindor girls, who shrieked. Harry held in his laughter and nodded politely to the nervous Gryffindors that lined the table before heading back to the

Slytherin table. He didn't look back at Hermione though, knowing she wouldn't approve.

10. Slytherin Past

Harry found the empty classroom without trouble and walked inside. He was pleased to find Hermione already there, studying at one of the desks. Harry smiled at her, then turned around and put a locking charm and silencing charm on the door - no need to make it easy to be interrupted again.

"Hi Hermione," Harry said. "I hope I haven't kept you waiting."

Hermione started packing up her books. "Hi Harry. Not at all, just getting some studying done while I waited." Harry smiled at his friend. "So, what do you want to know?" she asked, getting right to the point.

Harry shrugged uncomfortably. He sat at the desk beside her, looking at the empty blackboard at the front of the classroom. "Everything, I guess. I'm getting more and more memories, but I still can't see the big picture. I want to know everything about *me*."

It was Hermione's turn to shrug uncomfortably. "Well, I'm not quite sure what to tell you. I don't really know a whole lot about you-"

Harry shook his head and turned to look at her. "Please, Hermione. You knew more about me when I was eleven, and you *definitely* know more about me now. I just want to know why everyone's so...*afraid* of me."

Hermione's face grew sympathetic as she saw the obvious distress on Harry's face. She placed a comforting hand over Harry's. "Well, alright. I'm not sure where to begin, though..."

"Try at the beginning," Harry said with a smile, remembering Hermione's own advice.

Hermione smiled. "Okay then, at the beginning. Well, the years here aren't nearly as exciting as yours, except for second year which seems about the same. I first met you on the Hogwarts Express. I was helping Neville look for his toad, and you and Ron Weasley were sitting in the same compartment."

Harry nodded thoughtfully. "Yes, I think that part's the same. You came in and fixed my glasses, right?" (A/N: did that happen in the book? I remember it from the movie, but I only own the fifth book so I can't check.)

"Right," she said. "Anyways, we arrived at Hogwarts and were sorted. The hat seemed to take forever with you though, and finally it placed you in Slytherin. It was so silent at first, everyone was shocked, until Slytherin house started cheering. I was surprised that most of the teachers looked shocked as well, since they're not supposed to care."

Harry sat quietly, letting his mind wander through his memories; Hermione recognized his pensive look and gave him time to remember. Harry found that he only had one set of memories up to being sorted; in either world, Hagrid found Harry, he shopped in Diagon Alley, and he sat with Ron on the Hogwarts Express. Then he was sorted, and his two separate lives began. But why? Why Slytherin? Why didn't Harry beg to *not* be in Slytherin? Again, Harry let his mind remember freely. He thought back to the conversation with the Hat; he remembered being told he would do well in Slytherin. He remembered thinking that...that...

Suddenly, the answer came to him. "The Dursleys!" he cried aloud. Hermione looked at him in surprise, startled by his sudden outburst.

"The what?" she asked.

"The Dursleys! It's their fault I'm in Slytherin!" Harry said, pacing the room.

"I'm sorry, Harry. I don't understand. Who are the Dursleys?"

Harry stopped his manic pacing to look at her. He saw the obvious confusion in her eyes and reminded himself that this Hermione probably never heard his stories about his hated Aunt and Uncle and their whale of a son. He retook his seat beside her. "The Dursleys are my Muggle relatives, my mother's sister's family." Hermione gasped. "You didn't know my mother was a muggle-born, did you?" Hermione nodded her head. "Well, she was. When Voldemort

– oops, really sorry about that Hermione – killed my parents, Dumbledore sent me to live with them. They were absolutely horrid. They hated me; they always made me feel unloved, like a burden, and they kept me locked in a cupboard underneath the stairs. That’s where I lived for the ten years before I came to Hogwarts.”

Hermione looked aghast. “I’m so sorry Harry.”

Harry continued. “In my world, I didn’t want to be in Slytherin because You-Know-Who was in Slytherin, and I didn’t want anything to do with him. But in this world, I...I must have hated the Dursleys so much! The hat told me Slytherin could help me achieve my goals, and at the time, revenge on the Dursleys was my *only* goal. That’s why I accepted being placed in Slytherin.” Harry slumped in his seat, suddenly feeling exhausted. One simple decision changed so much. After a moment, Harry spoke again. “So, what happened next?”

Hermione cleared her throat. “Um, well, you kicked our butts in Quidditch, that’s what,” she said, eliciting a smile from Harry. “First year went along normally, and we tied for best marks. Then, at the end of the year, we found out Dumbledore died and You-Know-Who returned,” she added sadly.

Harry nodded. “That’s right. You-Know-Who came back. In my world, he kept his return a secret for a year, before making an appearance. The wizarding world at-large has only been dealing with his return for a few months.”

“Well, he’s been around for four years now,” Hermione said grimly.

Harry waited, but it didn’t look like Hermione was going to continue. Harry needed to know what’s been happening, so he gave her a little prod. “Hogwarts seems mostly the same. I would have expected some kind of...upheaval by Voldemort’s return. I mean, even the children of Death Eaters are still here.”

Hermione looked at him strangely. “Like who?”

Harry shrugged. "Well, there's Malfoy, of course. Then Crabbe, Goyle, and Nott. But those are the only ones I recognized."

"Recognized?"

"In fourth year, er, *my* fourth year, when I was kidnapped, You-Know-Who called his Death Eaters using the Dark Mark, and they appeared where I was being held."

"So...do you know who else is a Death Eater?" Hermione asked.

"Well, sure. There's Avery, Jugson, Macnair...and then the ones who broke out from Azkaban, like Dolohov and Lestranger," Harry said bitterly.

"Avery, Nott, Macnair...just like we thought..." Hermione said to herself. But Harry heard her.

"We? Who's we?"

Hermione looked at him surprised, then flustered. "Um...nothing. Er, just a few us a Gryffindors..." she said.

"Hermione, you forget that I spent the last five years being your best friend. I know when you're lying."

"Please Harry, don't ask..."

Harry looked into her eyes, all of a sudden an image flashed before his mind: McGonagall, the Weasleys, Tonks, Moody... "It's the Order, right? The Order of the Phoenix?" he asked excitedly.

Hermione looked ashen. "No!" she said in a high-pitched voice. "It's not the Order...it's..." She looked at Harry and seemed to realize that somehow, he *knew*. "How did you...?" she asked weakly.

"In my world, I knew all about it. Dumbledore was the head, and Lupin, Tonks, Mad-Eye Moody, Kingsley Shacklebolt, all the older Weasleys-

Hermione's face registered her surprise as Harry ticked off the names of the members of the secret society. "Have..have you told anyone?" she interrupted.

Harry looked a bit insulted. "Of course not! Why would you think that?"

Hermione stammered a bit. "Well, I mean...you're in Slytherin..."

Harry stood. "Voldemort killed my parents," he said firmly, ignoring Hermione squeak at hearing the name. "I will do everything in my power to defeat him," he finished, thinking of the Prophecy. "How do you know about the Order?" Harry asked, realizing that even in his own world, they were not allowed officially into the Order.

"I was recruited last year. A lot of the Gryffindors are in the Order, and a few of the Hufflepuffs and Ravenclaws too."

"In my history, they wouldn't let us into the Order. We were too young."

"You-Know-Who's been back for a number of years here. Maybe they thought we were needed."

Harry thought a moment and then nodded in agreement. "Please Hermione, tell me more about You-Know-Who. What's he been doing since his return? Why aren't things more...hectic?"

Hermione took a deep breath. "Well, since his return, You-Know-Who's been mostly consolidating his power in Eastern Europe. It's starting to look like Gr-Grindelwald all over again." Hermione shivered slightly.

"Grindelwald?"

Hermione shivered again and then fixed Harry with a look. "Honestly, don't you pay attention in History of Magic?"

Harry shrugged. "I guess in either world, Binns is too boring for me to stay awake," he said with a smile.

Hermione chuckled. "Grindelwald started by consolidating his power in Germany, then reached out to try and conquer all of Europe. Most historians think his downfall was trying to work with the Muggles, a mistake You-Know-Who isn't repeating, at least for now."

Harry nodded his understanding as memories starting filtering through, memories of news clippings about Voldemort's latest activities and the heated debates in the hallways and the Great Hall between Slytherins and Gryffindors. "So, with You-Know-Who on the Continent, we've been mostly left alone?"

Hermione shrugged. "You-Know-Who still attacks us every now and again, as if to remind us that we haven't been forgotten. He makes small terrorist strikes around the world while he builds his power base."

Harry and Hermione sat quietly, each lost in their own thoughts and memories. "Well, that tells me about Vol, er, You-Know-Who. What about me?" Harry asked.

Hermione thought a moment. "I'm not sure about you."

"I thought we already discussed this, Hermione."

"No. It's not that I don't know about you, your past. I just don't know *why* you did the things you did. But there is a lot of speculation."

"Why don't you tell me what I did, and then why you think I did them," Harry suggested.

Hermione nodded. "Well, academically you're at the top of the class, tied with me," she said begrudgingly. Harry smiled inwardly at her irritation at not being at the top by herself. "Except that...well...you've always seemed very interested in the Dark Arts."

"Yeah, I thought so," Harry said. "I realized in Defense class today that I seemed to know a lot about it," he added glumly.

"Yes, well, that's one of the reasons why people are...weary of you. That, and the incidents."

“Incidents?”

Hermione nodded. “In second year, there was that whole Chamber of Secrets thing. Then, when you rescued Ginny, it only increased the rumors. And then there’s the dueling club.”

“We have a dueling club? In my world, we only had one in second year.”

“That’s right. Professor Lockheart started a dueling club, but he ran off right before the end of second year, something about stress he said. When Professor Scott arrived, he reinstated it.”

“So, what happens in the dueling club?”

Hermione shrugged. “You always win. Even against seventh years, even when outnumbered three against one, you always win. And you usually use spells we’ve never heard of, spells that are borderline dark magic.” Harry nodded, understanding his lack of fear when confronted by nine Gryffindors. “And then,” Hermione continued, “there’s the fact that bad things always seemed to happen to people who made you angry.”

“Bad things?”

Hermione nodded. “Bad things,” she said, clearly not intending to finish.

Harry put his head down on the desk. “I don’t seem to be a very nice person,” he said. “So, the other big question: why?”

Hermione looked reluctant to answer. “I guess there are two main theories: that you want to join You-Know-Who, or that you want to replace him.”

Harry found that he took the news rather well. In fact, as he thought about it, he realized the truth of the statement...*this* Harry agreed with Voldemort’s stance against Muggles, but he would never serve the man who killed his parents. The Harry of this world wanted to replace Voldemort. But no one, not even the Slytherins, knew that.

11. Developing Feelings

During the rest of their conversation, Harry told Hermione about his world where Voldemort hadn't yet begun his second reign of terror. He also told Hermione of his fond memories of her, of the times that they, along with Ron, spent together in Hogsmeade.

Hermione fought to regain her breath, laughing at the thought of a white ferret bouncing merrily. "Gods, I wish I could have seen that!" she said happily. "I still can't get over the fact that I'm best friends with Ron Weasley! Ginny I can see, but Ron?"

"What's wrong with Ron?"

"Oh, nothing's *wrong* with Ron," she said dismissively. "It's just that...we're so different. I mean, he never does his homework, never pays attention in class, and talks about Quidditch all the time!"

Harry laughed. "Yup, sounds like Ron's the same no matter which world I'm in."

"Your world sounds much better," she said wistfully. "So many lives lost to You-Know-Who that could have been saved." Harry thought a second, remembering his sense of acceptance in Slytherin and that Cedric and Sirius were still alive here. He grunted non-committedly. Hermione looked determined. "We need to find a way to get things back to the way they were."

"But how? With Dumbledore dead, how can we do it?"

"I'm sure there's an answer somewhere. We just have to find it."

"In the library, perhaps?" Harry teased.

Hermione blushed slightly. "Well, that's the first place we'll check," she said. "Now, tell me about you. Describe what you're feeling, what you remember. Maybe we can find some clues."

Harry nodded and began describing the awful sensation of having two memories at once. He explained how things seemed familiar, yet very different, at the same time. Hermione took copious notes,

asking pertinent questions that Harry never thought about. He did, however, keep his preferences for Slytherin to himself. Hermione was intrigued, never having heard of a similar occurrence and always loving a chance to do some research. As Harry told his story, they shared a few laughs and chuckles at how he was adjusting, though Hermione still gave him a half-glare at scaring poor Colin and that fourth year boy. Harry watched her as she wrote down her latest observation, and he thought she looked rather fetching that way, her face concentrating on the task at hand as-

Whoa! Another thought he shouldn't be having! But then again, *this* Hermione wasn't his best friend, was she? In one sense, she was the same person, the same Hermione. In another sense, she was completely different – they had no shared history together. Perhaps that's what was different. There wasn't years of friendship to stop Harry's Slytherin side from thinking of her in *that* way. Harry suddenly remembered how she looked in their fourth year, at the Yule Ball. He was literally rendered speechless at the sight of her, and it was at that point when he finally realized that it was more than books and homework that made Hermione different from he and Ron.

"Are you okay, Harry?" Hermione peered at him.

Harry realized he had been staring. "Er, just fine, Hermione. But..."

"But what? What is it?"

"There is *one* thing. There's one difference between you and the Hermione I remember."

"What's that?" she asked, a little apprehensively.

Harry drew his wand and pointed it at her. Hermione stood suddenly and backed away, fear in her eyes. Harry quickly lowered his wand. "I'm not going to hurt you, Hermione. Please, trust me," Harry pleaded.

Hermione looked visibly torn between her knowledge of the old Harry and the new. After a minute, while Harry sat silently, Hermione nodded and sat back down. "I suppose if you wanted to curse me, you could have done so already," she said half-jokingly. Harry gave

her an encouraging smile, and raised his wand. He felt a sudden uncertainty, afraid that he might make a mistake. But the Slytherin side of him pushed away any doubts, confident in his abilities. Harry muttered an incantation, and a beam of light hit Hermione in the mouth. She immediately gasped and raised her hands to her mouth, afraid of what she might find. Harry smiled, pleased with himself. "There, all better. If you don't like it, I can change it back," he added quickly.

Hermione opened her mouth and felt around with her fingers. Her eyes widened slightly as she realized what had changed. "Do you have a mirror?" she asked softly. Harry shook his head, but then remembered it would be an easy piece of conjuration (**A/N:** I hope that's a word, but you know what I mean) to make a small mirror - easy, at least, for the Slytherin Harry. With a quick wave of his wand, a small pocket mirror appeared in the air, which Harry caught and handed to Hermione. She took it and examined her mouth, gingerly touching her now normal-sized front teeth. After a minute, she looked at him, astonished. "Why?"

Harry shrugged. "In my world, Malfoy and I sent curses at each other which deflected. You got hit in the mouth and your teeth grew, and you let Madam Pomfrey shrink them to this size. I figured since you let her do it then, you wouldn't mind it now." Harry thought about all the previous smiles she had given him – she had always given him a close-mouthed smile, apparently self-conscious about her previously overly large front teeth. "Besides," Harry added, "I miss seeing you smile with teeth. Do you want me to change it back?"

"Oh no!" she exclaimed and then collected herself. "I mean, thank you, Harry. I think I'll keep it," she said with a smile. Harry gave her a look, and she laughed before giving him another smile, this time dazzling with teeth.

A beeping drew Hermione's attention to her watch. "Oh goodness! I didn't realize it was so late! It's almost curfew."

Harry looked at his own watch, surprised at the lateness of the hour; they apparently spent close to three hours talking in the

classroom. "Wow, it *is* late. C'mon," he said, standing, "I'll walk you to Gryffindor tower."

"Gryffindor tower? But you don't know where..." she broke off upon seeing his face. "Ah, that's right. Okay, lead on," she said, and the two friends chatted as they walked the familiar route to Gryffindor tower, oblivious to the many looks they received. They paused somewhat awkwardly at the portrait of the Fat Lady before Harry gave in to his Slytherin side. He bent down, quickly kissed her on the cheek, and whispered his goodbye before walking back to the dungeons.

Harry sat in the Slytherin common room, helping a group of nervous fourth years with a Potions assignment. He was interrupted by a group of smiling, Slytherin sixth-year girls.

"Hi Harry," Millie said sweetly, a little *too* sweetly.

Harry regarded them with wariness. "Millie, Pansy, Daphne, Tracey," he said in greeting.

Daphne laughed at Harry's expression. "Don't look so suspicious, Harry," she said happily. "We just want to talk to you."

"Talk?"

"Talk," Pansy said.

"Just talk?"

"Just talk," Tracey said.

Harry made a grand display of sighing. "I guess I have no choice, right?" he asked.

Tracey smiled. "None whatsoever!"

"Alright, alright," he said, to the delight of the girls. The four sixth year girls quickly evicted the poor fourth years and took positions at the table, surrounding Harry. He gulped nervously.

"Oh, don't be so melodramatic," Daphne said teasingly.

Harry just grinned. "It's four against one. You'd be nervous too."

"Nothing to be nervous about," Millie said. "We just want to ask you about...Hermione."

Harry felt his jaw drop; of all the subjects he was expecting, Hermione was definitely not one of them. Then he felt a little annoyed. "Listen, you heard me when I explained what I was doing--"

"Oh, we *heard* you all right," Pansy said, with a mischievous little grin. "But it doesn't mean we *believe* you."

"What is that supposed to mean?"

The girls shared a look. "Let's just say," Tracey said, "that a little raven told us that you were spotting kissing the esteemed Miss Granger outside the Gryffindor common room."

Harry felt the blood rush to his face, then inwardly cursed; it would be hard to deny it when his body betrayed him by blushing. Harry momentarily considered the benefits and disadvantages of a quick Obliviate spell. "Well, we, er, that is..." he flustered. He gave up when he saw the four girls share a triumphant look. At first glance, Harry felt they were just curious; being girls, Harry thought they were interested in the rumors of a possible romance. But Harry had spent too many years being suspicious of Slytherins and their intents. He instinctively held each girl in a gaze, locking eyes for a moment. A silence descended on the group, as they started feeling uneasy under Harry's steady gaze. Harry was sure that there was only genuine curiosity, a little astonishment and perhaps a twinge of jealousy among them, and no hostile intentions. Harry smiled, which served to relax the girls. "Alright, fine. So I gave her a little peck on the cheek. No big deal."

"No big deal?!?" Pansy squealed. The others hushed her, and she blushed a little. "No big deal?" she repeated more quietly.

"Of course it's a big deal!" Mille added. "I mean, you're *Harry Potter*, and she's a mud..er, Gryffindor." Millie looked nervous, afraid of Harry's reaction at almost slipping out the word 'mudblood.'

Harry chose to let it slide. "Listen, I'm not saying that I have any feelings for her, but-" a chorus of skeptical noises interrupted him "-but she's really a great girl, once you get to know her." Harry was inwardly shocked at his admission, no matter how vague it was. The Gryffindor Harry would never, ever think of Hermione like that, much less admit it to anyone. Damn that those Slytherin influences!

"But...but...it's Hermione Granger! You've never spoken to her or about her once in the past five years!"

"I know, I know, but things change."

Daphne suddenly looked angry. She took Harry by surprise by grabbing his shirt collar and pulling him close. "Is this some kind of trick, Potter? Are you just toying with her emotions as some juvenile way of getting at the Gryffindors? Because if you are..."

Harry looked at her speechless a moment before gathering his wits. "I'm not. I'm really not," he said softly. "Hermione's...special. I feel like I've known her for years." He couldn't, of course, explain that he actually *has* known her for years.

Daphne's face softened, and she released him. "Sorry about that Harry," she said, "but I just wanted to know for sure."

"I think it's nice," Tracey said dreamily. Pansy eagerly nodded her agreement.

"But...but...it's Hermione Granger!" Millie said. The other gave her a glare. "Well," she said defiantly, "surely there's someone better, someone not so...bookish?"

Harry shook his head. "I'm not saying it's love or anything, but I do like her."

Pansy smiled. "Then you're going to need our help."

"Help?"

"Of course," Tracey said. "The boys are going to kill you when they find out you like a Gryffindor, much less Hermione Granger. You're going to need us."

Harry looked at the girls, at their earnest faces, and was suddenly struck with how much they cared for him. He couldn't imagine Lavender or Pavarti supporting him like this. Harry felt a sudden surge of emotion that left him unable to speak for a minute. "Thanks," he managed.

"Our pleasure," said Pansy, smiling. "Now then, we've been thinking, and we've come up with a few ideas." Harry groaned at their eager faces, suddenly wishing he could apparate on school grounds.

12. Falling for a Gryffindor

Harry walked to the Great Hall the next morning bleary-eyed and half-asleep. He hadn't gotten much, if any sleep at all, last night, and it was all *her* fault. Hermione Granger. Harry's interrogation by the girls left him realizing things he'd have much rather have left alone: that Harry actually had *feelings* for his best friend. Harry's previous romantic experience essentially boiled down to a wet, tearful kiss with Cho Chang, at least in his Gryffindor world. Over the night, Harry tried to remember if he had any romantic moments with girls in his Slytherin world, but aside from a few bouts of flirting, he came up empty. Harry didn't even have anyone to turn to for a "guy's" opinion; he had no father or brother, Sirius was otherwise occupied, and he certainly couldn't talk to his Slytherin mates about his feelings for a Gryffindor. Harry was grateful that the Slytherin girls supported him, but their constant talk of flowers, perfume, and romantic sunsets soon gave him a headache.

Harry sat down heavily at the Slytherin table, mumbling a few morning greetings as he reached for the plate of sausages. A few of the girls gave him sly looks, but he didn't have the strength to glare back. Harry ate quietly and let his eyes wander the Great Hall until they finally rested on the object of his affection. Hermione sat across the Hall from him, and he had to shift his position a little bit to get a clear view. She sat between Lavender and Ginny, reading her morning Daily Prophet as usual. The sun seemed to filter in from the enchanted ceiling just so, highlighting her hair and giving her a look of radiance. Her eyebrows were slightly furrowed as she read in concentration, her left hand idly playing with her fork, her lips pursed-

"Harry!"

Harry jerked up from his trance to find himself the center of attention: all the Slytherin sixth-years were staring at him, the boys confused, the girls silently laughing at him. "Er, what?" he asked lamely.

Pansy smiled at him tolerantly. "Can you pass the bacon? I've been asking for awhile now."

"Er, yeah, sure...sorry," Harry said as he passed over the plate. "My mind was elsewhere."

Daphne giggled next to him. "No kidding!"

"No kidding what? What's going on?" Blaise asked suspiciously, eyeing Daphne.

"Nothing, nothing at all," Daphne said lightly. "Harry's just found something more interesting to look at than his breakfast."

"Ah!" Ted chimed in. "Does ickle Harry Potter have a crush?"

Harry felt his cheeks redden. "Oh, leave him alone," he heard Tracey say. "I think it's sweet...very *Romeo and Juliet*!"

"Very who?"

Tracey groaned. "Don't you Neanderthals know anything about Muggles - Shut up, Malfoy - and great literature? Shakespeare? Hello? Ring a bell?" Tracey looked around at the table and finally threw her hands up in frustration.

"Anyways," Malfoy said, after shooting a perplexed look at Tracey, "who is it, Harry?"

Harry grew uncomfortable. Daphne leaned over. "You can tell them Harry. We're behind you all the way. They're going to find out eventually." Harry looked over at her and the other girls; they were all giving him looks of support, urging him on.

Finally, Harry sighed. "It's Hermione. Hermione Granger."

"What! You have *got* to be bloody joking!" Malfoy yelled, leaping to his feet.

"Sit down!" Daphne hissed. Malfoy looked around, suddenly realizing he was the focus of attention of everyone in the Great Hall. He sat down, an embarrassed look on his face.

"Well, still! Granger?! Please tell me you're kidding!"

"Shut up Draco!" Pansy said.

“What’s wrong with Hermione?” Harry demanded, annoyance overcoming his reluctance to speak about his developing feelings.

“She’s a mud-”

“Think about what you’re going to say,” Harry interrupted in-between gritted teeth.

Malfoy paled slightly, barely noticeable though with his already pale skin. “I-I mean...she’s a Gryffindor! Surely there’s a nice Slytherin girl that’s better for you! Here, take Tracey!”

“Draco!” Tracey cried indignantly.

“I don’t like Tracey, I like Hermione,” Harry said firmly. Then, realizing what he said, he turned quickly to Tracey, “No offense Tracey. You’re a wonderful girl, and any guy would be lucky-”

Tracey giggled. “No offense taken Harry.”

Harry smiled, then turned back to face the surprised Slytherin boys with a grim face. “Now listen here. I’m not saying I’m in love with Hermione, but I definitely feel something for her. If you’ve got a problem, keep it to yourself!”

Blaise swallowed uncomfortably. “No problem here, mate. Just surprised, that’s all. I mean, you’ve never even mentioned her before. Plus, she’s so...bookish. Doesn’t seem like your type.”

Ted nodded. “We have nothing against Granger. Honest. True, she’s a little annoying being a know-it-all, but that’s it. It’s just going to take a little getting used to. I mean...a Gryffindor!”

Harry chose to ignore the little jibes at Hermione. “Well, get used to it gentlemen, because I’m hopefully going to be spending a lot of time with her.” He looked at Malfoy.

Malfoy scowled when he noticed all eyes turn on him. “I still can’t...a m-Gryffindor! Millie, surely you can’t be fine with it?”

"At first, I wasn't," Millie admitted. "But it is kind of cute. I mean, she's going to Head Girl next year, and Harry'll be Head Boy, so it's like destiny!" she said with a dreamy look in her eyes.

Malfoy looked disgusted. "I can't believe you said that." Then he grew resigned. "Fine Potter. You and Granger. Great," he said half-heartedly.

Harry clapped him on the back. "It'll be fine Malfoy. Maybe if you're nice, I can set you up with Ginny Weasley?" They all laughed at Malfoy's horrified look, and even Malfoy chuckled. Harry looked around the table as the conversation turned to safer topics, absolutely flabbergasted at the support he found from a group of Slytherins. He did notice Malfoy's odd look, but decided that he would need a few days to get used to the idea.

Harry found Potions to be extremely difficult that day. Not because of the subject matter - Harry could brew *that* particular potion in his sleep - but because of the distraction provided by Hermione. Not that she was doing anything besides paying attention in class, mind you; her very presence made it hard for him to concentrate on his work. If Snape noticed Harry's distraction, he didn't mention it at all during class. After the bell signifying the end of class had rung, Snape called out, "Mr. Potter, may I have a word with you after class?" Malfoy gave Harry a sympathetic look as he shouldered his bag.

"Want us to wait?" Pansy asked.

"No, go ahead. I'll meet you at lunch." She nodded and left, not really worried at all that Harry would be in trouble in Potions. Harry waited until the class emptied (managing to share a smile with Hermione that made his insides flutter) before making his way to the Potions Master's desk.

"Professor Snape? You wish to see me?"

Snape looked at Harry in the eye, and Harry instinctively cleared his mind. Snape shrugged slightly. "I noticed your lack of attention today during class. Because you're usually very attentive, I'm curious."

Harry squirmed a little. "It's nothing Professor Snape. I'm sorry, it won't happen again."

"Yes, I see." Snape paused, a thoughtful look crossing his face. "They *can* be very distracting," he said knowingly.

"What? Who can?" Harry asked confused.

"Why, girls of course!" Snape said. Harry stared at Snape in shock. Was Snape actually talking to him about girls? It was so surreal; his surprise was so great he didn't notice his face grow warm. Snape just looked at him and smiled. "As hard as it is to believe, I was young once also. While I myself would not prefer a Gryffindor, they're a bit too...crass...I can understand the attraction. If there's anything you want to talk about, have questions about, or certain *potions* you might need, please don't hesitate to come to me," Snape said with a genial smile. "But don't let it interfere with your schoolwork, Mr. Potter," he said in a more Snape-like fashion before dismissing him. Harry could only nod dumbly before he left the classroom.

Harry walked the halls in a daze, his mind still not able to comprehend what had just happened. Did Snape just offer to talk about the birds and the bees? He supposed he should be used to surprises by now, but a *nice* Snape giving out girl advice was still too much. It was a little creepy. Harry found his way to the Great Hall and sat down.

"What did old Snape want?" Tracey asked.

"Er, nothing," Harry stammered. "Just potions stuff." For some reason, he couldn't talk about it. It was still too unreal. Tracey looked at him, clearly not believing, but decided not to press the issue.

Harry found to his great dismay that spending time with Hermione would be *much* harder than he thought. Being in different Houses, much less Houses that hated one another, made it difficult to cross paths; they had no common room in which to meet, and the route to Gryffindor Tower and the Slytherin Dungeons were far from each

other. Harry began to grow desperate, knowing that asking Hermione to spend time with him in an empty classroom would only work so long. Harry finally hit on an idea, deciding to use his Slytherin-ness to its fullest extent. After dinner, Harry wandered about until he spotted his prey. "Hey Anthony," he called out. Anthony Goldstein, the Ravenclaw prefect, stopped and turned to see who called his name. He, and those he was walking with, froze at the sight of Harry Potter walking up to them.

Harry reached the group of Ravenclaws that Anthony was with and stopped. And waited. He grinned inwardly at the looks of unease and surprise that greeted him. Finally, Harry found himself growing a little tired of the silence. "So, hi Anthony. Can we talk a moment?"

"Uh....s-sure Harry."

Harry frowned. "Alone?" he said, pointedly looking at the other Ravenclaws.

Anthony eyes widened and he backed up slightly bumping into Terry Boot. He looked at his Housemates. "Er, sure Harry."

Harry grinned as the other Ravenclaws walked slowly away, but not before asking Anthony if he was sure he wanted to be left alone. "So," Harry said, "I was wondering if you'd mind switching patrol night with me."

Anthony stared at him a moment before he let out a deep breath and let his shoulders slump. "Is that all?" he asked with obvious relief. Harry nodded. "Sure thing Harry. My night is tonight. When's yours?"

"Thursday," Harry replied. "Thanks a bunch Anthony; I owe you one. I'll go tell the Head Boy and Girl now," he said as he walked away, leaving Anthony to slump against the wall in relief.

Harry stood nervously outside the Transfiguration classroom, fidgeting from foot to foot. Finally, he heard the telltale sounds of

footsteps, and Harry quickly straightened his clothes and checked his hair with his hand. Then, he put on his most charming smile.

“Harry? What are you doing here? Is something wrong?” Hermione walked up to Harry, concerned. Harry watched her walk, observing the graceful way she moved. He noticed her eyes, her brown eyes filled with concern for him. The way her dainty hands held on to the strap of her bookbag, and the-

“Harry? Are you okay?”

Damn, caught staring again. Harry blushed slightly and smiled. “Everything’s fine. I just switched nights with Anthony. He, er, came to me and asked to switch.”

“Oh...ok,” Hermione said, and Harry couldn’t tell if she believed him. “Well, let’s get started then.” Hermione indicated down the hallway, and the two started their patrol route.

Harry found himself suddenly tongue-tied, his mind unable to think of a single topic of conversations. This was crazy! It’s Hermione, his best friend of five years, and yet Harry was a bundle of nerves. Hermione noticed his anxiety. “Are you sure everything is okay?”

Harry nodded. “I’m fine.”

“Are you having trouble adjusting to Slytherin House?”

Harry grasped onto the question like a lifeline. This was something he could talk about! “Not really. Actually, it’s been a lot easier than I thought it would be, though Malfoy is still a git.” Hermione laughed, and Harry forgot what he was saying, distracted by the sound. Oh yeah. “I’m actually surprised at how nice they are,” he continued.

“Nice? Slytherin’s and nice don’t go well together.”

“You just have to get to know them. I know, I know, it’s hard breaking down the walls between the Houses, but you always used to tell me how important inter-House relations are.”

"I did? Well, it is something that I say," she said, smiling at him. Harry loved to see that full smile. Whoops, focus, she's still talking.

"I'm sorry, what did you say?" Harry asked lamely.

"Honestly Harry, you're acting very funny today. I asked you if you told anyone else about your...situation."

Harry shook his head. "There's no one else that I trust," he said. "I would tell Ron, but I know he won't believe me."

"No, he definitely wouldn't," Hermione agreed. They continued on their patrol, discussing their prefect duties and things *not* related to Harry's predicament. They finished their patrol together, having run into nothing exciting, and Harry walked Hermione back to Gryffindor Tower. When they reached the portrait of the Fat Lady, Harry suddenly felt uncomfortable, unsure as to what to do next. Should he kiss her on the cheek again? Did she like it the first time? Would she think he was creepy if he did it again?

"Well, er..." Harry began.

"Good night Harry. Thank you for walking me back," Hermione said sweetly, before leaning forward and giving him a kiss on the cheek. She smiled warmly at him as she gave the password and disappeared behind a smiling Fat Lady. Harry stood there a moment, his hand to his cheek. Then a wide smile broke out on his face. Harry gave a small fist pump of celebration before heading to the dungeons. The past three days had been really busy: Harry woke up in Slytherin; he found he enjoyed being in Slytherin; Professor Snape was actually nice; and he developed feelings for his best friend. As Harry climbed into bed, he wondered idly what awaited him tomorrow.

13. Realized Feelings

The rest of the month went swiftly for Harry. Somehow, despite the sniggers of the boys and the dreamy sighs of the girls, Harry found ways to spend more time with Hermione. They talked before Potions and in the hallways between classes. Even though Harry loathed studying ahead, much less studying at all, he took every opportunity to sit with her in the library. Harry once again found a reason to be grateful for his Slytherin reputation, as people tended to shy away from their table in the library, allowing them their space. This was good for two reasons: Harry got some private time with Hermione, and they had the privacy necessary to research possible causes of Harry's switch. They spent many weekends together enjoying the day outside and walking around the lake, ostensibly to talk about their latest findings on Harry's situation, but they usually ended up talking about this or that. Harry also found ways to touch Hermione; a hand on her back to guide her gently through a crowded hall; a brushing of the shoulders whenever they sat together; gently touching her arm whenever they laughed.

Harry had no idea how Hermione felt about him, whether she considered him as something more than just a friend or just an interesting research project. He supposed he could try and find the answer in her mind using his legilimency skills (another skill that the Slytherin Harry seemed to have picked up somewhere), but it would require more than just a simple locking of eyes, as he had unwittingly used several times before. To find out the answer to his burning question (*that* answer had somehow become much more important than finding out how he got into Slytherin), Harry would have to actively cast the legilimens spell on her, and he knew it would be the worst possible invasion of privacy to do so. But still, Harry was encouraged. He knew Hermione well enough to know when she did *not* like something, and she gave no indication at being displeased by his constant attentions or his "accidental" physical contact.

As October rolled around, Harry found that he had never been happier. Quidditch practice was in full swing, the first match against Gryffindor in October. Harry was a little conflicted about playing against his old house, but the pure joy of zooming through the sky outweighed all considerations. He hadn't had a Voldemort-inspired

dream since the year began, and he wasn't worried that his life was in danger. His guilt over Sirius' death seemed distant, and he felt no urgency over his destiny to defeat Voldemort. Although he felt guilty at forgetting about Sirius, still locked up in Azkaban, he felt like he had a reprieve from all responsibility until his current situation was resolved. After all, why bother to work to free Sirius if Harry will just go back to his own world? Harry found acceptance in Slytherin, friends he never dreamed he would have, and he eventually grew used to the constant looks of fear and anxiety he got from other students.

Harry's relationship with Hermione was growing stronger each passing day. As expected, whispers and rumors floating throughout the castle. Any potential romance between a Slytherin and a Gryffindor would ignite talk, and being that the Slytherin in question was the famous Boy-Who-Lived, and that the Gryffindor was the bookish Hermione Granger, the rumor mill churned faster than normal. Fortunately, being the Boy-Who-Lived had its advantages as well; though people were dying of curiosity, most except the bravest of the lot were too afraid of Harry to say anything within hearing distance of the two. Harry was afraid that Hermione would be irritated with the attention, remembering how she reacted to Rita Skeeter's articles in the Daily Prophet, but she seemed mostly amused by the entire situation. Hermione was even finding slow acceptance with the other Slytherin girls: Daphne, in particular, had taken Hermione's acceptance as her own personal responsibility. Harry, for Hermione's sake, tried only superficially to become friendly with the Gryffindors; but from the looks of fear and anxiety that he got every time Harry appeared, he knew it was a lost cause. Hermione understood, and Harry was grateful that she didn't insist.

Harry and Hermione sat quietly in the library, looking over stacks of books. Although the subject of Harry's mysterious displacement rarely came up anymore, that night, Hermione and Harry were researching for a possible cause and cure. Hermione slammed her fist on the book she was reading in frustration, startling Harry.

"I give up!" she cried. "This is hopeless. We've spent an entire month looking through these dusty books and I'm tired of it!"

"Do my ears deceive me? Hermione Granger tired of looking through books?"

"Don't tease me Harry Potter, I'm not in the mood," Hermione said, though her half-smile belied her words. Harry reached over and took her hand, intertwining their fingers.

"It'll be okay Hermione. We'll find the answer, it'll just take some time."

Hermione looked at Harry and nodded. "Time," she repeated softly and smiled, and then turned her attention to her book. Harry also turned his attention back to the book he was reading. Harry's heart started to race as he realized that he still held Hermione's delicate fingers within his own, and he was suddenly paralyzed with the fear that she would be upset that he hadn't let go, or that she would simply take her hand back. But Hermione did *not* pull her hand back, and he started smiling like an idiot. The rest of the night they sat quietly side-by-side, acutely aware of their joined hands, but outwardly ignoring it just the same.

Hermione giggled. "Where are we going, Harry?"

Harry shushed her. "Quiet Hermione. You'll get us caught!" The two were presently huddled together underneath Harry's invisibility cloak, trying their best to walk down the deserted hallways while still maintaining their balance. Harry was pleased to find his father's old cloak at the bottom of his trunk. He remembered that in this life, like in his own, Dumbledore had given it to him as a Christmas present; Dumbledore must not have cared that he was in Slytherin at the time. When he showed Hermione, she was suitably surprised and impressed. Although she had read about them (of course), she had never actually seen one, and Harry took pride in demonstrating the cloak, as well as telling her a few stories about the times they had used the cloak in the past.

Harry had surprised her in other ways - ways that cemented the idea that he was, in fact, a Gryffindor in a Slytherin's body, so to speak. Harry knew about the "thing" that Ginny used, and explained to Hermione who Mooney, Padfoot, Prongs, and Wormtail really were. One night after patrolling, Hermione had mentioned she was a bit hungry, so Harry took her to the kitchens by tickling the pear. Hermione was impressed, not only by his knowledge, but more so by his treatment of the House Elves. The Slytherin Harry was as disdainful of House Elves as the next wizard, but *this* Harry showed an unexpected and welcome compassion and kindness.

"I guarantee you'll like it," Harry said to her. Harry led her to the area he was looking for and concentrated. Then, he carefully pushed open the door that appeared and guided her inside. Harry smiled broadly at what met them inside, and he was pleased to hear Hermione's gasp of surprise. The Room of Requirements looked nothing like Harry had ever seen before, which, to be honest, was only when he needed a place to train the DA.

"What is this place, Harry?" she asked, looking around in wonderment.

"It's called the Room of Requirements. We used it for the DA meetings," he said, allowing her to look around. The room had been transformed: the ceiling was enchanted to resemble the night sky, much like the Great Hall. A myriad of candles floated around the edges of the room, adding their light to the stars above, as fireplace roared in the corner, adding to the cozy feel. Hermione walked up to Harry, a smile dancing on her face.

"This place is beautiful!" she beamed.

Harry smiled, not trusting himself to speak just yet. He gestured towards the table that stood alone in the middle of the room. On it were two goblets, a carafe, and a plate covered by a silver lid. Hermione raised an eyebrow at him as she took a seat, Harry sitting opposite of her. He poured them both a goblet of pumpkin juice and, with a grand flourish, lifted the silver cover, revealing what lay underneath.

Hermione laughed delightedly. "Tiramisu!" she cried happily. Hermione had once told Harry, whether in this life or the

other he wasn't sure, that her favorite dessert was tiramisu, which was unheard of in the wizarding world. Harry had been surprised to find out how hard it was to find the dessert, but a quick escape to Hogsmeade and an apparition (another skill Slytherin Harry had mastered), Harry had secured the tasty dessert. Harry smiled at her as he produced two forks. The two friends ate happily, chatting away. Finally, after Hermione had taken the last bite of the cake, Harry cleared his throat and took her hand.

"Hermione, there's something I want to say." Harry paused, willing his heart to slow as he collected his thoughts.

"What is it Harry? You can tell me anything."

"I know I can," Harry said with a smile. "The last couple of months have been very trying. Everything here is different, and I'm constantly finding things out about myself that, well, frankly scare me. The people I was the closest with, Ron, the Weasleys, Lupin...they're all foreign to me, afraid of me. The people I despised, the Slytherins, are now my closest friends. Even the world around me is different: You-Know-Who, the Ministry, everything."

Hermione reached over and patted Harry's hand. "I'll always be here for you Harry," she said softly.

Harry gathered his courage. "That's exactly it, Hermione. You've *always* been there for me. Even though to you, we just really met last month, to me, you've always been by my side, no matter what kind of trouble I've found myself. In both worlds, I've come to rely on you to center me, to anchor me. I know now that I've taken some of that for granted, but not now, not here." Harry took a deep breath. "I think that, in this world, *not* knowing each other has helped me to see certain things, realize certain truths. Even though you are, at the core, the same girl I've known since first year, you have a different past, a past I've taken a delight in getting to know. It's like knowing you, and not knowing you, at the same time, if that makes any sense." Hermione nodded, her eyes shiny with unshed tears. "What I'm trying to say is that, you are the single most important person in my life, and...and I think I'm falling in love with you."

Harry let out a deep breath. There, he had said it. His insides twisted almost painfully as he waited for a response.

Hermione sniffled and quickly wiped her eyes. "Oh Harry," she sighed. "I...even though I just got to know you this year, I do feel like I've known you forever. You're nothing like the Harry Potter I went to school with for the past five years, at least the Harry Potter I could see from across the Great Hall. If you had told me at the beginning of the year that I would be sitting here, with you, I would have called you crazy. But I am here, and you're not crazy. I...I'm not sure what I feeling right now Harry. Is it love? You have the benefit of years of history with me; I only have the past two months. But they've been some of the best months of my life. I don't know if I'm falling in love with you, but I know I'd like to find out."

Harry felt something wet on his cheek and belatedly realized that a few tears had escaped his eyes. They stood and walked around the small table, meeting halfway. Harry reached for her waist as she put her arms around his shoulders. With his heart racing and a tingly feeling in his chest, Harry and Hermione leaned towards one another to share their first kiss together. And it was everything he thought it would be.

Halloween night, the Great Hall was adorned with decorations. Live bats flew about the enchanted ceiling, highlighted against a clear, starry night. The feast, as usual, was fabulous, and Harry enjoyed himself immensely. Harry and Hermione had only sat at the same table for meals a handful of times, and they sat apart this night, not wishing to create any nervousness on such a festive event. They had, however, agreed to meet afterwards in the Room of Requirements to share dessert, a nice pumpkin pie that Harry had the House Elves prepare especially for them.

Near the end of dinner, a sudden flash startled Harry as he was deciding whether or not he could handle another slice of ham. The flash was neither bright enough nor large enough to garner the attention of anyone else, and Harry rubbed his eyes in the belief it was imagined. However, after replacing his glasses, Harry spotted a

thick envelope now sitting before him, his name stenciled on the front. Harry looked around at the emptying Slytherin table and found no one had noticed the appearance of the envelope; the feast was over and most of the students had left, only Malfoy and Blaise sat nearby, finishing off a turkey. Harry eyed the letter with suspicion before gingerly picking it up. He regarded it a moment, before tearing the envelope open. Inside, he found a letter and a gem. The gem was about the size of his palm and thin. A mist seemed to swirl within, and Harry looked at it quizzically before turning his attention to the letter. He read quickly, his face revealing his mood as it changed from curiosity to shock. He looked up quickly and spotted Hermione making her way over to the Slytherin table.

“Ready?” she asked pleasantly. Then, noticing the look on his face, she sat next to him. “Harry? What’s wrong?”

Harry stared at her a moment before finding his voice. “Hermione, I know what happened. I know why I’m in Slytherin, and I know how to change things back.”

Hermione eyes widened in surprise. “But...how?”

Harry held up the letter he was holding. “Dumbledore.”

14. Choices and Decisions

“Dumbledore? But...Dumbledore’s dead, Harry.”

“I know Hermione,” Harry said, and then looked around. Blaise and Malfoy seemed engrossed in their turkey, but this kind of conversation required absolute privacy. “C’mon, let’s go somewhere we can talk,” he whispered. Hermione nodded, and the two left the Great Hall and immediately found an empty classroom. Harry cast a locking charm, and the two sat together.

“How Harry?” Hermione asked. Harry wordlessly handed over the letter he received. Hermione looked at him perplexed before taking the letter and reading.

Dear Harry,

If my calculations are correct, you should be receiving this letter and accompanying gemstone on Halloween night, wherever you may be. Hopefully by now, you’ve realized that something has changed in your life and have had the time to fully appreciate your life. What has changed, I do not know, as that is the nature of the spell. But I get ahead of myself; perhaps I should start from the beginning.

Harry, I have led a long life and am fortunate in that I have few regrets. My biggest regret thus far, though, has been my immense failure to you, my startlingly bad lapses in judgment. It began immediately with my decision to send you to live with your Muggle relatives. I believed it the best for your own protection, but I could not fathom the horrible treatment that you would receive. Had I known, I would have made other arrangements, no matter how difficult. It was my oversight that led you to face Lord Voldemort at the tender age of eleven, and my own failures that caused you to face mortal peril every year hence. Last year truly showcased how I have failed you; for by keeping certain truths from you, I placed yourself and many others in danger, culminating in the death of your Godfather. I had spent the summer searching for a way to make my reparations, and I believe I have found a way.

In moments I will cast a spell that has only been hinted at in the ancient texts. I have worked ceaselessly to perfect it, and at last I have succeeded. It is a fine work of spellcraft, if I do say so myself. This spell will change one thing in your life, the one decision that, once changed, will take away your heartache. I do not know what decision that will be. It may be my decision to place you with the Dursleys, or it may be my decision to keep the truth of the Prophecy from you in your first year. The spell will allow you to remember the past as you lived it, so you may judge the impact that a single decision has on your life. Your life may be very similar to the one you have led, or it may be very different. Only you will know.

The enclosed gemstone is the key to the spell. To reverse the spell, simply break the gemstone; that's all it takes. Only you, as the focus of the spell, have the power to break the gemstone. If unbroken for another sixty days, the mists within the gem will disappear and the changes will be permanent. Be aware of the risks, though. This is not time-travel, you will not return to the first of September. Time will have passed, and unforeseen events will have occurred. Decide wisely.

Harry, I cannot express in words the guilt and sorrow I feel. I have failed you in so many ways, and it is my utmost hope that this spell, in someway, gives you a small measure of happiness.

Yours truly,

Albus Dumbledore

Hermione finished reading the letter, the surprise clearly written across her face. "I can't believe he could do such a thing," she said wonderingly.

"Well, he is, or was, the most powerful wizard alive," Harry observed.

"Yes, but to interfere with time like that. I can only imagine the depths of guilt he felt that would cause him to do this."

Harry nodded. "He couldn't have known that his spell would cause You-Know-Who to rise years earlier and for so many to die by his hand. Or that Dumbledore himself would die."

Harry and Hermione sat quietly, absorbing the enormity of the revelation. "Well," Hermione said, "now you can break the gem and return things to normal." But Harry sat quietly, fingering the gemstone. "Harry?" she asked.

Harry held up the gem. "It's amazing to think that this simple gemstone is the cause of all of this. All I have to do is break it to wake up in Gryffindor. It'll be as if none of this ..." Harry broke off, looking down.

"Harry, are you ok? I would think you'd be happy to finally know what happened."

"I'm...I'm relieved I guess. I'm relieved to finally know the truth, to know that I wasn't going nutters and imagined the whole thing."

"Harry," Hermione said hesitantly, confused by his morose behavior. "We can make things right again. All you have to do is break the stone."

"Break the stone..." Harry repeated softly, refusing to look at Hermione. "And everything goes back to normal, right?"

"Right," Hermione said encouragingly.

"But...but what if I don't want things to go back to normal?" Harry said, finally lifting his head to look at Hermione.

"Don't want...huh?"

"I don't want things back to normal," Harry said more firmly. "Dumbledore was right. The spell worked. I *am* happier now."

"But...You-Know-Who! So many people have died fighting; the wizarding world was taken by surprise. In your world, he doesn't come back strong. He needed time to regain his power and your warning allowed people to prepare. So many lives were saved!"

"I...I don't care!" Harry roared, getting to his feet. "I'm so sick of everything happening to me! Cedric's not dead here, Sirius isn't dead! You-Know-Who isn't constantly plotting to kill me, or those

closest to me! I'm not an outcast here – the Slytherins...the Slytherins accept who I am! Don't you see Hermione? That other life, that other world, I was miserable there! I hated my life! But here, I'm actually happy. I...I have you here."

"But Harry," Hermione said, clearly surprised by Harry's reaction, "you have me in your other world too."

"Do I? It's different, Hermione. We have years of friendship; back there, you only know me as your friend. How do I know you'll even consider me as anything else?"

"Oh Harry," Hermione said, clearly affected by his words. "I've only known you for a couple of months here and I think I love you. Over there, I've known you for years; I'm probably already in love with you, you just don't realize it yet."

"You...you think you love me?" Harry asked.

Hermione blushed, realizing what she said. "Um, well, yes Harry, I think I do."

Harry walked over to her and hugged her tightly. "I love you too, Hermione," he whispered.

"Oh Harry," she said as she hugged him, "I just hope you realize what you're doing by not breaking the gem."

Harry took a deep breath of her scent. "I do, Hermione. Besides, I still have two month to decide."

November passed by in a blur for Harry. The gemstone weighed heavily on his mind, the decision hanging over him like an albatross. Harry and Hermione still spent many hours in the library, but this time their research was focused on events in the wizarding world over the past four years – the four years that would change if Harry broke the gemstone. Harry could tell Hermione was torn between insisting that he break the stone to save the lives Voldemort

had taken, to supporting Harry and giving him his chance at happiness.

Harry still stood by his initial decision to preserve the spell, but their research sessions shook the foundation of his choice. Each time Harry read about a Death Eater attack, the loss of life and property, he was reminded that he had the power to change all that. But then Harry would return to the Slytherin common room, where Daphne, Pansy, Tracey and Millie would demand details about his relationship with Hermione, sighing happily. He would play Exploding Snap with Blaise, Wizards Chess with Ted, or a pick-up game of Quidditch with all of Slytherin House and become lost in the camaraderie and acceptance that he only previously shared with Ron and Hermione. Harry missed Ron's friendship, but he had an even deeper, more meaningful relationship with Hermione, and that softened the blow. Harry was *happy*, but each night the guilt of his decision kept him awake.

In the middle of November, Harry was able to ignore his problems for at least one day: the first Quidditch match of the year, Slytherin versus Gryffindor. Hermione, of course, found a way to support both teams ("Simple Harry. I hope you catch the Snitch but Gryffindor wins the match"), and the two shared good-natured teasing about the upcoming match, though it was very light seeing as how Hermione really didn't care that much about winning. The morning of the match, Harry met Hermione in the entrance Hall as the team was filing off to the stadium.

"Excuse me, Miss Granger?"

Harry and Hermione turned to see Professor McGonagall walking towards them.

"Yes, Professor?" Hermione asked politely.

"May I have a minute of your time? One of the school governors, in for the match, would like to have a word with you."

"Me?" Hermione asked, looking at Harry.

“Yes. He has heard about your academic achievements and would like to talk about your future.”

Hermione looked a bit uncertain. “But the match...”

“Oh, don’t worry Miss Granger. The governor also wants to watch the match as well; I believe you will be finished before the match begins.”

“Okay Professor,” Hermione said excitedly. “I’ll see you later, Harry. Good luck!” she said as they shared a quick kiss. Harry watched Hermione walk away with Professor McGonagall, and then grabbed his broom to meet the rest of the team in the locker room.

[A/N: insert Quidditch stuff here. Lots of flying around and scoring and saves. Harry, of course, beats Ginny to the Snitch and Slytherin wins. Harry just reacts while in the sky and doesn’t think about the fact that he’s playing against his old house. Sorry, I just can’t write Quidditch, or maybe I’m just too lazy; besides, wouldn’t you rather read about more plot-advancing things? So anyways, what’s up with the Snitch being worth 150 points? Talk about anti-climactic...basically reduces the game to a race to “catch the Snitch” and makes the rest of the team insignificant. I mean, you could be in the middle of a nail-biting game, 120-120, then boom! it’s 270-120! Oops, sorry, I’m ranting a bit. On with the show...]

Fanatic Slytherin cheering accompanied the team as the team walked back to the locker room. Harry happily accepted the compliments of his teammates and felt a sense of elation at beating the rival Gryffindors. This victory cemented a decade of dominance over the Gryffindor team, Slytherin winning eight of past ten matches. Harry stood at the self-replenishing water fountain and satisfied his burning throat.

“Nice catch, Harry.”

“Thanks. Nice score there, Malfoy. Good bludger work, guys.” Crabbe and Goyle grunted in response.

“Hey Harry, we’ve got a surprise for you,” Malfoy said, a glint in his eyes.

“A surprise?” Harry said, immediately wary. Even though he has been on friendly terms with this version of Draco Malfoy, Harry still couldn’t help but be a little suspicious.

Malfoy laughed. “Don’t look so suspicious, Harry. Me ‘n the other sixth year guys have a little surprise for you. We feel bad about how we treated Grang, er, Hermione, these past years and how we reacted to the news of you two together, so we made something to make it up to you.”

Harry relaxed, seeing Malfoy’s smile; Crabbe and Goyle, of course, still held their blank expressions. “Alright Malfoy, surprise me,” Harry said good-naturedly.

“Not here, Harry. C’mon, let’s get back to the castle.”

“Like this?” Harry asked, indicating that they were still in their Quidditch robes.

Malfoy nodded. “This can’t wait. The rest of the guys are waiting. Let’s go before the celebration starts.”

Harry saw the sense in that; once the victory celebration started, Harry wouldn’t have a moment alone for the rest of the weekend. But still, Harry still hesitated. “I’m supposed to meet Hermione-”

“Don’t worry about that,” Malfoy said. “Pansy’s already told her about the surprise. I’m sure she’ll wait for you.” Harry finally agreed and followed Malfoy, Crabbe, and Goyle back to the castle. “Right over here,” Malfoy said, pointing at an empty classroom and gesturing for Harry to go first. Harry gave him a curious smile, which only grew to confusion as he walked in to find the room completely empty.

Harry turned. “Malfoy, what’s going-”

Three voices rang out as one, “Expelliarmus!” As Harry turned, three spells struck him at the same time. His wand flew from his holster as he was thrown backwards, landing painfully on the floor. Harry slowly

dragged himself to his feet to find Malfoy, Crabbe, and Goyle each pointing their wand at Harry's chest, his own wand held in the triumphant grasp of Malfoy.

15. Confrontations

"Alright, what the bloody hell is going on?" Harry demanded, as Crabbe and Goyle moved to stand on either side of him.

"It's simply, really, Potter, even for a half-blood like yourself to understand," Malfoy said condescendingly. The door opened, and to Harry's surprise, Lucius Malfoy walked in.

"Ah, if it isn't the famous Harry Potter," he said in an oily voice as he tossed an object towards Harry. Harry instinctively caught the shiny object, the blood draining from his face when he recognized what it was – the necklace Hermione was wearing this morning.

"Wha-"

Lucius sneered. "Your mudblood is fine – for now. The Dark Lord has taken the gemstone, Potter - my boy here has finally shown that he has some use after all. The Dark Lord likes the world as it is, and he has taken the mudblood to *ensure* that you do nothing to disrupt his carefully laid plans. Once the mists disappear from the stone and the spell is permanent, the girl will be returned."

Harry seethed, itching to wipe that smirk off of Malfoy's face, both of them. But the three wands pointing at him gave him second thoughts. "You...you lured Hermione away. You're the school governor who wanted to talk to her!"

Lucius nodded. "The Dark Lord never said you were stupid."

"So, Voldemort gets the stone, and Hermione will be returned unharmed?"

After recovering from hearing Voldemort's name spoken aloud, Lucius laughed. "Did I say 'unharmed?' I suppose we'll have to see, won't we? Oh, and don't even think about alerting any of the professors, as if they would believe you anyways. They're all being watched by *faithful* Slytherins."

“But...how?” Harry asked. “How did you know about the spell?”

“Ha!” Draco said derisively. “You honestly thought I wouldn’t notice an envelope appear out of thin air? I was *there*, Potter! I heard *everything*!”

“But...I put a locking charm-”

Draco snorted. “Yes, but I think a silencing charm would have served you better.”

Harry cursed himself for forgetting something so basic. He was so shocked by the revelations of the letter that it completely slipped his mind. “You won’t get away with this,” Harry said lamely.

“Is that the best that you can do, Potter?” Lucius and son shared a laugh.

Harry stood unmoving. There had to be some way of getting out of this mess, but without his wand, things were looking bleak. Harry could physically overpower Draco, but the two brutes were another story. Plus, even though Lucius hadn’t drawn his wand yet, he had to have it somewhere-

The door to the classroom opened, and for a split second Harry felt a moment of hope. “What, did you start without me?” Ted Nott said in a light voice as he closed the door behind him. “Mr. Malfoy,” he said politely, before moving to stand behind Draco and point his wand at Harry.

“Ah, so good of you to finally join us,” Draco said sarcastically. “I just explained the situation to Potter, though he looks a bit unhappy with it all,” he said tauntingly.

“Well, Draco, he’s not the only one,” Ted said, moving his wand so that the tip rested against the back of Malfoy’s neck.

“Nott! What the hell do you think you’re doing!”

"Shut up, Draco!" Ted said, wearily eyeing the others. The two large Slytherins boys seemed to be surprised into inaction, and Lucius looked mildly amused. "Drop the wands."

"What are you planning, huh Ted? You gonna take us all on? You think you can take down my *father*?"

"If I have to," Ted said resolutely. "Now, drop the wands or else I'll make you." Harry privately thought that Ted should just stun Draco and be done with it.

"You blood-traitor!" Draco roared in anger as he dropped his and Harry's wands.

"You stupid git!" Ted yelled back. "Just because my father is a Death Eater doesn't mean I am!"

Malfoy whirled around and grabbed Ted's arm, and the two began struggling. Harry used the distraction to his advantage by kicking out savagely with his leg, striking Goyle painfully on the instep. Before Goyle fell to his knees, Harry struck Crabbe in the nose with his elbow, producing a yelp of pain from the larger man. Harry lunged forward for his wand while the two Slytherins recovered. Harry grabbed his wand and turned quickly, rolling to the side as a blast of red light stuck the ground beside him. Harry muttered an incantation and, with a flick of his wrist, both larger boys were violently thrown backwards by a blast of air. Harry turned quickly and instinctively ducked as another jet of light slammed past him. The elder Malfoy had finally drawn his wand.

"Give up, Potter. You have no chance against me."

Harry and Lucius simultaneously sent spells at one another; Harry's stunning spell seemed to gobble up Lucius' spell, and he was flung backwards where he crumpled to the ground. Harry took a quick glance to make sure that Crabbe and Goyle were still out cold before looking to see how Ted was faring. Not good. Draco stood over Ted body, wand in hand, with a look of triumph in his face. The triumphant look quickly disappeared when Draco saw Harry, wand in hand. Draco looked around frantically, until his eyes landed on the prone bodies of his two cronies and that of his father.

"Now Potter, let's be reasonable..." Draco stammered.

"Reasonable?! You expect me to-" Harry was interrupted as Draco quickly shot off a stunning spell. But Harry was quicker and had cast a shield before Malfoy had finished his incantation. The red light struck Harry's shield and zoomed back towards Malfoy, hitting him in the chest and sending him sprawling to the ground. Harry quickly conjured ropes to bind the Malfoys, Crabbe, and Goyle. The threats neutralized, Harry ran over to check on Ted. He breathed a sigh of relief when he saw Ted was still breathing, though shallow. "Ted, Ted, can you hear me?" Harry asked. No response. Harry muttered "Enervate" and Ted's eyes blinked open.

"Harry?" he asked weakly.

"Yes, it's me, Ted. How do you feel?"

"Like I was hit by a bludger...or ten," he said with a smile. Harry grinned and helped his friend to sit up. Ted looked around. "I see you took care of them." Harry nodded.

"Why Ted? Why did you help me?"

"It's like I told Malfoy: just because my father is a Death Eater, doesn't mean I am. I...hate my father," he said resolutely.

"Thanks Ted," Harry said gratefully. Just then, the door burst open again, and Harry immediately sprang to his feet, his wand aimed at the newcomers.

"Harry, we heard – Oh Merlin! Ted, Malfoy...Harry! What's going on?"

Harry looked at the confused faces of Pansy, Daphne, and Blaise. He did not lower his wand. "What are you doing here?" he asked with a hint of menace.

Blaise recovered first from seeing his friends tied up and a wand pointed at him. "Millie said she saw you guys walking in here...we were coming to get you for the party...then we heard spells...is that Draco's father?"

Harry looked at each of them, locking eyes. He carefully searched for any images of Death Eaters, but saw none. Relieved, Harry lowered his wand. He looked around. "It's a long story."

Daphne knelt down next to Ted. "Are you okay?" she asked him.

Ted nodded. "Just a stunner from Draco. I'm tough."

"Draco?" Pansy said, her eyes widening. "What the heck happened here?"

"That's what we'd like to know!"

Harry raised his wand again as Pansy and Blaise whirled around to face the latest to enter the classroom. Daphne protectively tightened her grip on Ted.

"Sheesh Potter, not that I don't mind seeing Malfoy all trussed up, but what *has* been going on?" Ron Weasley said, Ginny, Neville, and Lavender behind him.

"None of your business Ron," Harry said, lowering his wand. "What are you doing here, anyways?"

"I was supposed to meet up with Hermione to watch the match," Lavender said nervously. "But she never showed."

"Someone mentioned they saw you here, so we came to see if Hermione was with you," Ginny said, completing the story. Harry groaned inwardly and cursed his recognizability. (**A/N:** is that a word? If not, it is now!)

"Well, Hermione's not here, so you can move along."

"Yes, let's go," Neville said anxiously, tugging at Ron's sleeve. "Maybe we should go tell a professor-"

"No!" Harry said suddenly. Everyone looked at them curiously, and Harry realized that they wouldn't simply walk away and forget such an odd scene. He sighed. "Fine, come in and close the door. Someone cast a locking and silencing charm on it, please."

Ron looked at him wearily before complying, the other Gryffindors following his lead. Pansy reached over and cast the charms on the door, and then they all looked at Harry expectantly. Harry took a deep breath, and then began to explain the entire story from the point when Malfoy asked him to go to the castle to when Pansy and the others walked in, though he declined to explain *why* Voldemort wanted the crystal, leading them to believe it was a powerful piece of dark magic, believable given what they knew of Harry.

“So,” Blaise said, breaking the silence after Harry finished his tale. “What do we do now?”

“We? What are you talking about Blaise?”

Blaise looked at Harry as if he were a bit slow. “You-Know-Who has Hermione. You can’t go to a professor, so that leaves us. What are we going to do to get her back?”

“We aren’t doing anything, Blaise. I will figure something out while the rest of you take care of Ted.” His statement was met with a sudden outburst of protest.

“If you think we’re just going to let you go off by yourself, you have another thing coming, mister!” Daphne cried.

“Waitamminute...hold on a second...HOLD ON!” Ron roared. He got the silence he was looking for. “Whatever else that’s happened, Hermione is one of ours, and Gryffindors do *not* leave their own behind. Whether you like it or not, Potter, we’re going after her!”

Harry looked at the people around him, feeling an odd sense of *deja vu*. From the determined looks they all shared, he knew it would take a long time to convince them to stay, assuming he could convince them in the first place, and Hermione’s time was running out – the longer she stayed in Voldemort’s hands... Harry shuddered at the thought. “Okay, fine,” he said finally. “But I want you all to think about it. Voldemort!” he yelled, suddenly

As expected, shrieks and gasps followed. Harry scoffed. “How do you expect to fight him if this is how you react to just hearing his name? Not only will you face Voldemort himself, but also he’ll

undoubtedly have his Death Eaters, fully trained adult wizards, with him. You can all be killed!"

The Slytherins and Gryffindors exchanged looks. "Then you'll definitely need our help," Blaise said. The others nodded. Harry sighed. "It's your choice," he said. "But first, we need to find out some information." Stepping over to Lucius' limp body, Harry muttered "Enervate" and Lucius' eyes slowly opened.

"Where is she, Lucius?"

"<bleep> you, Potter!" he said angrily, though Harry detected the fear in his eyes.

"You're a brave man, Lucius, I'll give you that. But do you *honestly* think I can't get the information out of you?" Harry asked, brandishing his wand.

"You won't get anything from me, Potter; The Dark Lord ensured that I won't speak anything that would betray him. Not even Veritaserum would work"

Harry regarded Malfoy with a look of disdain. "I don't need you to talk for me to find out what I want to know," he said ominously. Harry pointed his wand at Lucius. "Legilimens!" Immediately, Harry was granted access to Lucius' most closely guarded memories. Harry was able to easily sift through the images, searching for the memories that would help him find Hermione. Lucius did his best to resist, but for someone of Harry's abilities, his resistance only served to cause him great pain, something Harry did not mind. Finally, Harry plucked the memories he was looking for. "Thanks Malfoy," he said to the wheezing and gasping Slytherin, before stunning him again.

"Everyone wait here," Harry said. "I'll be back, I promise. Just watch over Lucius and the others." Harry rushed to the Slytherin dungeons. He found his invisibility cloak and returned to the classroom where the other waited for him. "Anyone change their minds?" he asked. No one had. Harry grabbed Lucius' cane from where it had fallen; he had seen in Lucius's mind that it served as a portkey that would take him back to Voldemort once his message had been delivered.

“Okay then. Here’s the plan. Ginny, Pansy, Daphne, and Lavender, you’re the smallest and should all fit together underneath the cloak,” Harry said, handing it over to Daphne.

“What is that?” Ron asked.

“It’s an invisibility cloak,” Pansy answered for Harry as she and Daphne draped it around their shoulders. “C’mon Ginny, Lavender.” The two Gryffindors hesitantly made their way over to them and allowed the cloak to be placed over their shoulders as well.

“Okay, cover up now,” Harry said, and the four girls disappeared completely from view. Harry then turned to the boys. “Ok, relax now, this won’t hurt a bit,” he said, mostly to Ron and Neville. Harry waved his wand and cast a disillusionment spell on three of the boys, passing over Ted. Ron whistled in appreciation. “Sorry Ted, someone has to stay behind in case we don’t succeed, and you’re the wounded one.” Ted looked stricken, but he accepted the wisdom of Harry’s words. Harry debated on whether to disillusion himself, but thought better of it. The disillusionment charm did not make them invisible, only blend in; Harry knew they would eventually be spotted. But if Harry remained visible, he would garner all the attention and the others could move and act freely. Harry decided to take the risk.

“Now,” Harry continued. “This cane is a portkey. Everyone put a finger on the cane. Wands out.” After everyone had complied, Harry asking for verbal confirmation from the invisible girls, he muttered the activation word that he pulled from Lucius’ mind. Harry felt the familiar tug at his navel as they were whisked off.

16. Into the Lair

A landing after a portkey was never an easy thing. Blaise was knocked off balance into Ron, and the two fell into a heap on the ground. Amazingly, Neville managed to keep his balance, but only barely. Harry managed to land solidly, which was fortunate given the two Death Eaters standing nearby. Before they could react, Harry flicked his wand, and a silver streak seemed to leap from one Death Eater to the other, immobilizing them both. After making sure there were no other threats, Harry offered his hand to help the invisible pile of girls to their feet while Blaise and Ron untangled themselves.

"Everyone alright?" Harry whispered. Several nods and invisible assents responded. Harry tied up the two Death Eaters and disillusioned them, making their bodies harder to spot. "Okay, let's go then." Harry headed towards the only noticeable exit from the room. As Harry walked down the hallway, he was again surprised at how different reality was from what he thought. Previously, he imagined that the Slytherins spent most of the free time plotting evil things in their common room; that had been far from the truth. Now, Harry expected Voldemort to be living in a castle hidden away somewhere, with dank and dark walls of stone with a sense of spookiness that pervaded the entire place. Instead, Harry found himself in a brightly lit corridor, like that of an office building, and there were even tasteful paintings on the walls. It was simply too cheery to be the headquarters of the most evil wizard of his generation. Harry stopped suddenly when he heard the sound of approaching footsteps. "Flatten against the walls," Harry hissed as he frantically looked for a place to hide, a door to escape through. There was none, so Harry stood his ground, wand raised.

Three Death Eaters casually strolled around the corner, animatedly talking about something or another. They paused when they saw Harry standing in the middle of the hallway, simply too stunned to react. "Stun the two on the either side and wrap up the one in the middle," Harry said, seemingly to himself. Then, in rapid succession, he cast a silencing spell on each Death Eater. As the Death Eaters reached for their wands, several voices could be heard at once as a number of red lights struck down the two Death Eaters on either side, and four sets of ropes were conjured to incapacitate the one in the

middle. Harry chuckled, reminding himself to be more specific about who does what next time. Harry turned to the still conscious man, bound more than securely. Harry raised his wand and muttered, "Legilimens."

After a moment, Harry stood. "We're in luck; this isn't a main Death Eater site; though Voldemort is here. I think I know where Hermione is." Harry resumed his walk down the corridor, the reassuring sound of invisible feet behind him. At the end of the hallway, Harry found a half-open door. Peeking through, he saw a large, open room. His heart leapt when he spotted Hermione lying in the center of the room, bound and gagged. It took all of Harry's self-control to not blindly run into the room. As best as he could, Harry looked around the room and found it deserted, at least for the moment. Harry considered his options, meager that they were. Harry pointed his wand at her. "Accio," he whispered, but her body didn't move. "I'm going in to get her," he whispered. "Stay here unless you're needed." Harry heard a murmur of assent, and he slowly entered the room.

As he had thought, it was empty except for the body in front of him. Harry carefully approached Hermione, who noticed him with wide eyes. She started squirming and making indecipherable noises behind her gag. Harry knew then, at her panicked expression, that he had walked into a trap, but it was too late. Harry sprinted over to her, hoping to get them out of the room before-

"Ah! Mr. Potter! So good of you to join us!" Voldemort's silky voice echoed throughout the room. Harry ignored the glib taunt as he focused on freeing Hermione.

"Oh Harry!" she wailed once he had freed her of her gag.

"Are you alright Hermione? Did they hurt you?"

She shook her head. "I'm fine Harry, but you shouldn't have come for me! Now we're both trapped," she cried.

Harry smiled at her. "Nothing could keep me from coming to you."

"Aw, so sweet, so touching," Voldemort's voice echoed. "You're feelings for the mudblood will be your downfall, Potter!"

Harry turned and saw Voldemort approach. Hermione shrieked and shrank back in fear, clutching desperately at Harry. "What is this, Voldemort? Just you and me, wizard-to-wizard?" Harry knew that Voldemort was the more accomplished wizard, with decades of experience behind him, but he knew he stood a better chance in a one-on-one duel with the Dark Lord than against a horde of Death Eaters.

"Ah, if only. You see, I knew that fool Lucius would most likely fail in such a simple task; those Malfoys seem rather useful only to a point. But this will work out better." Voldemort snapped his fingers. Within seconds, the whooshing sound of portkeys could be heard echoing throughout the hall. Over a dozen Death Eaters suddenly appeared in their dark robes and masks, surrounding Harry. "Now then, Mr. Potter, whatever will we do with you?"

Harry grimaced. He gently disengaged himself from Hermione's grasp. "Stay down," he whispered in her ear, cursing his oversight of not bringing her a wand. She nodded mutely, and Harry looked around. He spotted a slight blurring near the doorway, and hoped that it was his reinforcement. "What's the matter Voldemort, afraid to face me alone?" Harry asked loudly, ignoring the cries of anger and surprise from the Death Eaters (and possibly invisible students) at the use of his name. "What do you expect me to do? Everyone target a different Death Eater and then attack them all at once when I give the signal?"

Voldemort's eyebrows, or what passed for eyebrows on his snake-like face, furrowed in slight confusion at Harry's words. He recovered. "No, Potter. I expect you to die."

"Now!" Harry cried, hoping that the others had gotten his not-so-hidden message. Harry cast a shield spell and wrapped his arms around Hermione, using his body as an additional shield. Red lights sprang from unseen sources as several Death Eaters were stunned. Voldemort looked around confused until he realized what had occurred. He waved his wand, and a warm wind swept through the room, revealing the three disillusioned boys. The four of the seven remaining Death Eaters turned their wands on the boys, while the other three kept their aim on Harry.

“Very tricky, Mr. Potter. Very...Slytherin of you,” Voldemort said. “But I’m afraid, not enough.” Before Voldemort could enjoy his victory, four beams of red flashed out from nowhere, striking down the Death Eaters who had trained their wands on the boys. Ron responded by quickly stunning one of the Death Eaters who was guarding Harry. The other two boys followed suite and aimed at the other two Death Eaters, and with one of the girl’s help, they were quickly stunned. That left Voldemort standing alone, spluttering with rage.

“What! How!” Voldemort said, losing his composure. Harry groaned as one of the girls whipped off the invisibility cloak, revealing their presence; he had hoped to keep their presence a secret for as long as possible.

“Very good, Mr. Potter!” Voldemort said. “My, you *are* full of surprises, aren’t you? I suppose I shall allow you your little victory, but it shall be a hollow one, indeed.” With that, Voldemort flicked his wand and set a silver light streaking towards Harry. His aim was off, though, and Harry easily avoided the blast. “Farewell, Mr. Potter, we shall meet again. But in the meantime, I thank you and that fool Dumbledore for this!” Voldemort taunted, holding up the gemstone.

That was his mistake, a result of his arrogance and underestimating Harry’s reflexes, honed through years of Quidditch. Before Voldemort could make to apparate away, Harry raised his wand. “Accio gemstone!” he cried aloud, and the gem flew from Voldemort’s grasp and into Harry’s outstretched hand. Harry slashed his wand and set a purple flame at Voldemort, who conjured a shield to dissipate the flame. But six cries of “Stupify!” rang throughout the room and Voldemort was struck several times. Harry stepped forward and added his own attack, and it was clear that the odds were against the Dark Lord. With a final scathing look at Harry, Voldemort disappeared in a swirl of his robes. A whooshing sound told Harry that the unconscious Death Eaters had been somehow whisked away by whatever means Voldemort used. Harry breathed a sigh of relief as he looked at the gemstone in his hand, happy that no lives were lost in his latest encounter with Death Eaters.

“Harry!” Ginny’s cry brought him back. Harry turned to look at her, and he felt his stomach drop. “Harry,” she cried again as Hermione lay in her lap, her fingers stained with blood as she tried to stem the increasing flow. Harry belatedly realized that Voldemort’s intended target wasn’t himself, but that who he cared the most about.

“Hermione!” Harry cried, rushing to Hermione’s side. It was bad. The silver streak had punctured through Hermione’s chest, leaving a gaping wound that Ginny was desperately trying to staunch with her a ripped-off piece of her sleeve. “Oh god oh god oh god,” Harry repeated, his mind paralyzed with fear.

“Harry!” Ginny’s voice broke through his panic. “Do something!” she pleaded.

Harry grabbed his wand and started casting as many healing spells as he knew, which wasn’t many given his focus on the Dark Arts. It wasn’t enough; the flow of blood had slowed, but not stopped. “Please...” he whispered as the tears flowed freely.

“H-Harry?”

“Hermione!” Harry cried, cradling her head with one hand and clutching her hand with his other, sticky with blood.

“Harry!” Hermione gasped, as tears started forming in her eyes. “You did it Harry, you beat him,” she whispered.

Harry shook his head. “Oh god, Hermione...I’m sorry!”

“No Harry, it’s my fault. I should have stayed down like you said. I’m so sorry,” she said weakly through her tears. She gave a sudden gasp as pain filled her face.

“No Hermione! Please don’t leave!” Harry cried desperately.

“I-I love you Harry. I don’t regret anything Harry. Remember that...it’s not your fault!”

“Hermione!” he wailed, as her eyes seem to go blank. “No!” he cried out, grabbing her lifeless body from Ginny and holding her tight,

oblivious to the blood seeping onto his robes. It wasn't fair! Just as he found happiness, a world where he found acceptance and belonging, just as he found *love*, Hermione was taken from him!

But it didn't have to be that way, did it? Harry still had the gemstone, and he could still break the stone and return to a world where Hermione was still alive. But...that world, did he want to go back? Back to a world where he was both savior and deviant? Back to where he had caused Sirius and Cedric to die? Back to a House that didn't fully accept him as plain old Harry? Harry looked up, at the faces surrounding him. Ron, Ginny, Lavender, Neville – he missed their friendship, he would have that back again. Pansy, Daphne, Blaise – he had grown to love them as his family. But in his old world, they would be hated rivals, and he would lose everything he had come to cherish in so short a time.

But then, Harry returned his eyes to Hermione's face, her lifeless eyes. Could he really live without her? Harry was afraid, afraid that the Hermione in his world would not be able to love him, that five years of friendship would prevent her from feeling something more from him. It was a risk; if he broke the gem, he would lose everything; the acceptance, the freedom, and possibly the love of Hermione. But Harry knew that if he didn't break the gem, he would always wonder, always think of her and what might have been. In the end, it really wasn't much of a decision. Harry gently lowered her body to the ground and drew his wand. He pointed it at the gemstone, which he had dropped when he realized Hermione had been struck down.

"Diffindo," he said sadly, cleaving the gem in half. A mist seeped out from the two halves of the broken gem, and Harry's world swirled to black.

17. A New Beginning

"Harry? Harry? C'mon man, wake up!"

Harry opened his eyes, his vision slowly coming into focus. He blinked rapidly as full consciousness took force. He realized he was lying down, surrounded by a sea of anxious faces. Gryffindor faces.

"Are you alright Harry?" Ron asked, helping him to a seated position. Harry put his hand to his temples, rubbing gently.

"Yeah, I think so. What happened?"

"We were just talking, celebrating our win over Slytherin, when you just collapsed. No warning, you just fell down and collapsed," he heard Ginny say, the worry evident in her voice.

"I'm fine," Harry said wearily. So, it worked, he was back. Harry sighed heavily, a moment of grief for the life he left behind. All of sudden, his face shot up. "Hermione! Where's Hermione?"

Ron looked around. "I'm not sure...I think she mentioned something about studying in the library before the celebration starts."

"So...she's alright then? I mean, she's not hurt or anything?"

Ron gave him a quizzical look. "Of course she's fine. Why?"

Harry breathed a sigh of relief. That worked as well. "Nothing. I just need to see her." And he did need to see her. Now. Harry was afraid if he waited, he would lose his nerve. He had to act while the Slytherin part of him was still fresh. "I need to see her," he repeated, getting to his feet. Ron looked at him worriedly.

"Alright mate, I'll give you hand," he said, sharing a worried look with the other Gryffindors. "C'mon." Ron helped Harry stagger through the portrait hole and down the hall until Harry regained full use of his legs. They walked in silence for a bit, Ron obviously worried about his best friend's behavior.

"Ron?" Harry asked. "Has anything...odd happened lately?"

Ron's eyebrows furrowed. "Odd? What do you mean?"

Harry shrugged. He was facing that familiar feeling of having two memories, but this time it was the memory of the past three months as a Gryffindor that was missing. "My memories just a bit fuzzy," he said. Upon seeing the alarmed look on Ron's face, Harry quickly added, "It's nothing to worry about; it'll come back. I just want to know if anything...strange has been going on. With You-Know-Who, or between us, you, me, and Hermione."

Ron shook his head. "Nothing odd, Harry. You-Know-Who's been quiet, what with everyone on the lookout for him. Hermione's actually been nicer about studying this year, without OWLs to bug us about, which I *suppose* could be considered as odd. But that's it."

Harry nodded with a sigh of relief. He had been afraid that bad things might have happened in the two months he'd been "gone." Soon after, they reached the library and Harry spotted Hermione within, partially hidden by a stack of books. Ron made to go in, but Harry stopped him.

"There's something you should know, Ron." Harry took a deep breath, dreading this conversation. He'd suspected that Ron might have feelings for Hermione, and he wasn't sure how Ron would react, whether with anger, jealousy, resignation, or all of the above.

"What's that, Harry?"

"I've been doing some...thinking ever since we got back to school. I...I think I love Hermione."

"Well, sure Harry, we all love Hermione-"

"No Ron, I don't just love Hermione, I'm *in* love with her, as in 'til death do us part,' love"

Though Ron looked confused by the 'death do us part' statement (clearly not part of a wizarding marriage ceremony), he clearly understood the first part. He gulped. "You...love Hermione, like you want to date her?"

Harry chuckled. "Yes, date and more. I think I want to spend the rest of my life with her."

"Oh," Ron said and was silent for a minute. Harry gave Ron the time to let his brain process the startling news. "And, how does she feel about you?"

Harry shrugged. "That, I don't know. I'm planning on telling her now."

"Oh," Ron repeated.

"Listen Ron, I know that you like her too-"

That seemed to break Ron from his stupor. "Hang on a minute. You know what?"

Harry grew uncomfortable, hoping that he wouldn't have to spell out this part. "I know that you like her too, that you want to date her-"

"Back up a minute there, Potter. What on earth gave you that idea?" Ron asked, confusion all over his face.

"Well, you were awfully jealous when she went with Krum to the Yule Ball..."

Ron's face cleared, and he raised his eyebrows as he remembered. Then, surprising Harry, he laughed.

"What?" Harry asked.

"I don't *like* Hermione in that way, Harry," he said between chuckles.

"What? Then why were you acting so jealous?"

Ron sobered. "It wasn't that I liked her..." He looked distinctly uncomfortable.

"What was it, then?"

"I...I guess I was afraid of losing her. I mean, the two of us, we'll always be best mates. No woman could split us up. But Hermione's

different. She could find a guy who will take her away from us. With the two of us, we'll always have Quidditch and guy things to do; but Hermione's a girl....it's not the same. I was just afraid she would like Viktor better and then leave us."

"So...you *don't* like her?" Harry had to be sure.

Ron laughed. "No Harry, I don't like her. I mean I like her, she's our best friend, but I don't like her like you like her. Actually, I'm happy that you *do* like her. If you two get together, then we'll never be rid of her."

"You aren't worried that we'll...you know...exclude you?"

Ron shrugged. "I've always known that someday you'll find a girl and exclude me in some way. I mean, I *do* have five older brothers, you know. It'll be an adjustment, especially having to watch the two of you snog, but I can handle it."

Harry smiled. "Thanks Ron."

"Good luck mate," he said, clapping him on the back. "But keep in mind that if you hurt her feelings, I'm going to have to kick your arse." Ron laughed then walked away, leaving Harry to his fate.

For a long moment, Harry considered running away. He could always retreat and regroup, circling with Ron to figure out a way to brooch the subject, see if they could figure out what Hermione was feeling instead of Harry just blurting his own feelings out. But then, Harry's Slytherin side piped up, reminding him of time they spent over the past three months in his other version of reality. It's now or never. Harry squared his shoulders and marched up to her.

"Hi Hermione," Harry squeaked. He cleared his throat, knowing that things weren't starting off well.

Hermione looked up. "Oh! Hi Harry," she said, with a glint of amusement in her eyes. She caught his squeak, unfortunately.

Harry looked around, noticing the emptiness of the library. Good, less people to witness his possible humiliation. "Mind if I sit?"

"Of course," Hermione said, smiling as she moved a stack of books aside. Oh, how Harry loved that smile, those teeth, those lips...the way her eyes danced-

"Harry? Were you going to sit?"

"Er, yeah," Harry said, feeling foolish at being caught staring. "Anyways. Hermione."

"Yes?"

"So...how are you?" he asked, clearly chickening out at the last moment.

Hermione chuckled at Harry's obvious discomfort. Little did she suspect that the reason was *her*. "I'm fine Harry. Nice catch earlier, by the way."

Catch? Ah yes, the Quidditch match. "Thanks. So, anyways, I was hoping to talk to you..."

Hermione gave him a wry smile. "Isn't that what we're doing?"

"Well, yeah, but...I mean talk about something important."

"Sure Harry, anything. What is it?"

"Well..." Harry said, at a loss of where to start. 'Try at the beginning,' suggested Hermione's voice in his head. Harry grinned. "Something happened to me-"

"Oh no! What is it? Voldemort?"

Harry took her hands in his own, trying to calm her down. "No, nothing like that, I've just-" Harry looked down at her hands and stopped talking. He was suddenly reminded of the last time he had held her hand, covered with blood.

"What is it Harry?" Hermione asked, concern evident on her face.

"I..." Harry started, but he found he couldn't continue. Hermione had been killed because of him, because of their relationship. Voldemort kidnapped her specifically because they were together. Harry suddenly realized that he couldn't tell her how he felt – it would place her in too much danger. As long as Voldemort was alive, he would have to keep his feelings to himself, even if it meant that Hermione found someone else in the meantime.

"Harry?"

Harry forced a smile. "It's nothing Hermione. Just something I need to tell you and Ron about later."

"Oh...okay. Is that all? It seemed like there was something else...?"

Harry shook his head, standing. "That's all. Oh, and I wanted to make sure you're coming to the party later."

Hermione smiled at him. "Of course Harry. I'll see you there."

"Okay, see you later, Hermione." Harry waved and then left the library. As he walked away, Harry found that he was filled with a sense of resolve – if it took defeating Voldemort for him and Hermione to be together, well, then that's just what he'd have to do.

A/N: And so ends my second story ever. Yay, thanks to everyone for reading! Kinda threw you for a loop at the end, with Harry changing his mind? Not a very satisfying way to end it, right? Well, just as an innocent observation, I'm sure by now everyone knows that at the end of *Matrix: Reloaded*, after the credits, there was a preview for *Revolutions*. I think that maybe you should read through my thanks sections and see if there's anything *interesting* at the end.

So, thanks to everyone who reviewed so far! I had a lot of fun writing the story and reading all the reviews, and even more fun responding to them! I'm not sure I would do anything different if I had the chance. Maybe write some more scenes about Harry

and Hermione dating early on and the Slytherin's reactions, but I had an urge to get to the action.

To all future reviewers, check out the newest chapter of my latest story and I'll probably have a few words of response for you there.

I hate to thank only certain reviewers, since it might make it sound like I didn't appreciate everyone's reviews. But some deserve special mention for reviewing many, many, many times:

My star reviewers are still **ears91** and **onkel**. You two kept it up from my first story, and I really appreciate it! **Starre** was right up there too, but I'm afraid I lost her when I went evil!Draco :(

There are a bunch of prolific reviewers from my first story who followed me to this one that I want to thank: **Romm**, **Maxx77**, **keebler-elmo**, and **Facade1** - though you too disappeared on me :(Why Facade why?? <throws self off cliff wailing>

New reviewers to this story I want to thank are: **A.M.bookworm247**, **naughty little munchkin**, **Narcissa-Malfoy-22**, **liseli vanida-kateb**, **Calen**, **zarak**y, and **ennui2**.

If anyone is interested in a few H/Hr fluffy one-shots, I have four over in the H/Hr - Challenges forum at Portkey under Trick or Treat, 3 Minutes in a Closet, Stuck Where?, and 'Mione Stop Studying. They're usually at the end, though Trick or Treat is in three posts.

ennui2: Harry does remember everything from his Slytherin reality, which does not encourage a "happily ever after" type ending (hint: scroll down past the responses).

Jeff b: Nothing really happened to all the other kids. Only Harry remembers and knows about the other reality, for everyone else it's as if three months have passed as normal.

A.M.bookworm247: you make me blush; I don't think my head can fit through the door of my office anymore!

Squirrelface RAE: Hi! Almost didn't see you sneak in; thanks for giving this story a chance.

ears91: Because I don't like to leave people in suspense if I can avoid it, I'll tell you now that absolutely nothing of importance occurred during the three months that Harry "missed" in Gryffindor.

Honey Bee 80: Hi Honey Bee. Your reviews are like bookends: one at the beginning and one at the end :)

naughty little munchkin: more exams? STOP THE MADNESS!! Good luck :)

Preview

Here's a preview of the sequel *Harry Potter and the Decisions of Fate: Consequences of Choice* (working title). Keep in mind like all movie previews, the scenes may not be in order and some parts may be cut out.

"I still can't believe you *liked* being a Slytherin!" Ron said, looking highly affronted.

"It wasn't that bad, Ron. I mean, they're not so bad once you get to know them. It's really Malfoy's fault that they're all so horrid."

"Still...they're Slytherins!"

"Well, I think Harry's right," Hermione said, sounding very businesslike. "Not all Slytherins are destined to become dark wizards, Ron."

"Well, most are," Ron grumbled under his breath.

“Daphne! Daphne, wait!” Harry cried, running across the grounds to catch up with the Slytherin.

“Leave me alone Potter!” she said acidly.

Harry rushed to her side. This couldn’t be happening, not again. But it was: Hermione lay on her side, the blood slowly pooling from her body. Harry reached her the same time as Ginny, and he quickly turned her over, fearing what he would see.

“That’s it,” Harry roared, finally succumbing to the anger as he leapt to his feet. “I’ve suffered through five years of your taunts and abuse, and I’ve had enough!” An icy chill seemed to fill the room, and Snape looked upon Harry with wide, frightful eyes.

But as Harry walked away, he couldn’t help but feel like a liar, and a bitter one at that. He had given up everything by breaking the gemstone to be with Hermione. And here he was a Gryffindor again and miserable, and worst of all, he had lost the very reason for returning.

Each day seemed to be harder than the one before it. He spent every minute with her; attending classes together, studying together, eating together. Each minute being with her and not being able to hold her, to touch her, to kiss her, was a slow torture.

Something snapped deep within Harry. He fixed Malfoy with a cold glare, waving his wand. A dark mist seemed to surround the three Slytherins, gradually obscuring them from view. He could hear their panicked voices crying out, he could see the fear growing on their faces as the mist enveloped them, and Harry felt *glad*. Soon the mist

overtook the even the large forms of Crabbe and Goyle, and only their cries of terror could be heard.

“Harry,” she cried, her voice fighting to be heard above the whipping winds. “Please don’t do this, it’s not you, it’s not who you are!”

But Harry just looked at her, his eyes cold and dead. It was just too much, too much pain, too much anger. He raised his wand again and muttered an incantation.

Look for *Harry Potter and the Decisions of Fate: Consequences of Choice* to hit a website near you sometime in December or January ‘04. The cast is currently on location on another story, the first chapter of which should be posted tomorrow.

Alternate Final Library Scene

From Original:

“Er, yeah,” Harry said, feeling foolish at being caught staring. “Anyways. Hermione.”

“Yes?”

“So...how are you?” he asked, clearly chickening out at the last moment.

Hermione chuckled at Harry’s obvious discomfort. Little did she suspect that the reason was *her*. “I’m fine Harry. Nice catch earlier, by the way.”

Catch? Ah yes, the Quidditch match. “Thanks. So, anyways, I was hoping to talk to you...”

Hermione gave him a wry smile. “Isn’t that what we’re doing?”

“Well, yeah, but...I mean talk about something important.”

“Sure Harry, anything. What is it?”

“Well...” Harry said, at a loss of where to start. ‘Try at the beginning,’ suggested Hermione’s voice in his head. Harry grinned. “Something happened to me-”

“Oh no! What is it? Voldemort?”

Deleted Scene:

Harry raised his hands, trying to calm her down. “No, nothing like that...nothing bad, at least I don’t think so...I’ll have to talk with Dumbledore later. Really, it was his fault.”

“What happened? What did Dumbledore do?”

Harry looked at her and shook his head. "It's not important. I promise I'll tell you later," he said quickly, interrupting the protest he knew was at the tip of her tongue. Oh, that wonderful tongue, those-

"Harry?"

"Sorry. Anyways, some things have happened that made me realize something. Something very important."

"What's that?"

Harry hesitated, then reached over and clasped both of Hermione's hands in his own. "Hermione, you've always been there for me ever since our first year. We've gone through so many things together, and you never backed away me; you never let me do things on my own no matter how hard I pushed you away. You've always been by my side, no matter what kind of trouble I've found myself. I've come to rely on you to center me, to anchor me. I know now that I've taken some of that for granted, but anymore." Harry paused a moment, somehow thinking that the last bit sounded familiar.

Hermione took his pause as a chance to speak. "Harry, you know I'll always be there for you no matter what. I'll always be your best friend."

"I know that Hermione, but I don't want that."

Hermione looked taken aback. "You don't...want to be friends?"

Harry shook his head. "I don't...I want to be more, Hermione. I want us to be more than just friends. What I'm trying to say is that...Hermione Granger, I love you."

"Er, I...uh.."

Harry placed a finger over her wonderful lips. "I know this comes as a bit of a shock. I'm not asking for a response right now, I don't expect you to return my feelings. I just want you to *consider* it. We've been friends for such a long time that I understand it's hard to think of me of anything other than just a friend. I just want you to

consider the *possibility* of something more. And don't worry, no matter what, no matter what you decide, I'll always be your friend."

Harry smiled at her stunned face and then stood. "I'll see you later at the celebration, okay?" She nodded dumbly and Harry turned towards the exit. Although he wasn't realistically expected a declaration of mutual love, it *would* have been nice, or at least a smile. Ah well, as it was, things could have gone much worse; at least she hadn't looked horrified at the idea, just shocked. Harry had just reached the exit when her voice called him back.

"Harry, wait." Harry turned and was surprised to find Hermione standing only a few meters away. "I've considered it, Harry," she said softly, looking into his eyes.

"And?" he said, barely a whisper.

Hermione didn't respond. Instead, she reached up with her right hand and gently pulled his head down, where her lips met his own. It was just like he remembered.